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**Holistic Philosophy and Classroom Practice:
an Investigative Study of the Steiner-Waldorf Approach to
Teaching Geography**

Phillip Wright

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with
requirements for award of the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Social
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Abstract

This research explores the philosophical framework that guides the Steiner-Waldorf approach to geography. Inspired by the author's own practice as a Waldorf class teacher and the challenges this involves, it draws, in the first half, on Steiner's holistic worldview, or anthroposophy, to examine two realms of his educational philosophy. In chapter 1 Steiner's understanding of child development is considered as the basis for Waldorf education's imaginative pedagogy and educational goals. Chapter 2 then examines the epistemological and ontological framework of anthroposophically-inspired geography, including curriculum knowledge. This theoretical analysis highlights the distinctive features of Waldorf's unique learning discourse, from which two related research questions emerge. Firstly, how do class teachers interpret the educational philosophy and engage pupils in geographical understanding? Secondly, what kind of worldview do teachers present?

These questions, rooted in Waldorf's underlying philosophy, are then considered through an analysis of various interpretations and discourses surrounding classroom practice, which focuses on the twelve to fourteen age group. This is undertaken in two parts. In chapter 3, having established a methodological framework that is suitable to the learning context, I reflect on my own practice. Investigation then proceeds through dialogues with class teachers, exploring different viewpoints. This is followed by an analysis of the discourse involved in knowledge construction in different lesson contexts. These studies highlight both the nature of pupils' learning experiences and areas of ambiguity in the knowledge-building process. Finally, in chapter 4, an extended study of classroom discourse considers these aspects of Waldorf's holistic schema in more depth, in particular whether the child's emerging intellect is sufficiently engaged and the nature of the worldview constructed. This highlights the need for Waldorf to be reflective of its own philosophical position and maintain flexibility in key areas of classroom practice.

AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University’s Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate’s own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: *P.K. Wright*.....

DATE: *28/5/10*.....

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*I look into the world,
in which the sun is shining,
in which the stars are sparkling,
where stones in stillness lie,
where living plants are growing,
where animals live in feeling,
where human beings within their souls
give dwelling to the spirit.*

*I look into the soul
that lives within my being
The World Creator weaves
in sunlight and in soul light,
in world space there without,
in soul depths here within.
To Thee, Creator Spirit,
I seeking turn my heart
that in blessing and in strength,
for learning and for work
in me may live and grow.*

Verse recited in the Waldorf middle school at the beginning of each school day.

Introduction

Motivations, Aims and General Structure of Research

The motivation to pursue this research arose from my personal experience as a Waldorf class teacher, teaching mainly 11 to 14 year olds, and the questions that subsequently emerged regarding its philosophical framework, developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) in the early twentieth-century. Popularly known as a form of education that withholds formal learning i.e. literacy and numeracy, in favour of play, the Waldorf approach is underpinned by its own metaphysical worldview, known as anthroposophy or spiritual science, which offers a comprehensive and systematic understanding of how spiritual processes work in the physical world.¹ Resonating with “New Age” interest in holistic beliefs, anthroposophy has been used as the framework for various forms of therapeutic practice, including medicine and agriculture, as well as education.

Having previously taught geography in the state sector, I was initially drawn by Waldorf education’s greater emphasis on teaching the “whole” child, and, on a metaphysical level, Steiner’s insight into the human condition and place in the universe.² Teaching in the Steiner system therefore offered the opportunity to combine a personal interest in spirituality with the professional practice of teaching. No other form of education appeared to integrate the spiritual dimension in such a rigorous way.

Comparing my experience of the two different approaches raised important issues regarding both the general aims of education and the challenges involved in working with a holistic philosophy. On the one hand, and a key aspect of the Waldorf approach that drew me towards it, was Steiner’s broader view of the intellect and the emphasis given to freedom in the learning process. Having taught within the national curriculum framework, with its narrowly-defined learning goals and standardized, cognitive-based forms of assessment, Waldorf education offered what seemed a more creative approach to learning, free of bureaucratic control.³ Furthermore, the universal philosophy and worldview upon which it is based, with its focus on the child’s natural cognitive and moral development, transcends any instrumental agenda. During my initial encounters

¹ Anthroposophy, translated as the ‘wisdom of man’, is also a form of spiritual training. Details of Steiner’s worldview are presented as this thesis progresses.

² “Waldorf School” and “Steiner School” are synonymous.

³ Prior to re-training as a Waldorf teacher I taught GCSE and A level geography in mainstream schools.

with the Waldorf system I became aware that it had real potential, both as a philosophical framework for personal and professional development, and as a balanced, child-centred form of learning. The high standard of teachers' creative activity and insight into pupils' needs, as well as pupils' self-confidence and engagement in lessons, reinforced this view.

On the other hand, although Waldorf's holistic philosophy offered the opportunity to develop classroom practice through deeper insight into the child, it also presented obvious challenges. Whereas the national curriculum schema is a more standardised approach based on detailed specifications and a framework of cognitive skills, the Waldorf approach relies primarily on individual, creative activity.⁴ Drawing on my own experience, classroom practice that depended primarily on the rational procedure of selecting relevant information from given texts (e.g. articles, textbooks etc.) and teaching given schemas of geographical interpretation, was, on moving to the Waldorf system, replaced by a method that relied heavily on imagination. And, in tune with Waldorf philosophy, this depended on developing a learning strategy and subject knowledges to suit the anthroposophical understanding of the child. Whilst Steiner constructed a detailed image of the child, his curriculum indications for different subject areas were brief. In the spirit of Waldorf, classroom practice relies essentially on the insights of the individual teacher. Furthermore, this challenge is intensified by Waldorf's unique organization of subject lessons.⁵

This emphasis on the subjective element of class teaching led to an interest in how Waldorf's general philosophy translates into classroom practice. Acknowledging that Waldorf teachers follow certain universal principles I also became aware that, allowing for free interpretation of these, approaches to main lesson teaching can be highly varied. It was also my experience that Steiner's intriguing philosophy and worldview, in a Foucauldian sense a powerful totalizing discourse, can lead to unreflective and potentially problematic areas of practice. Reflecting on my own classroom experience, and particularly drawn to the challenges involved in teaching geography, these emerged

⁴ This may appear to generalize or caricature the mainstream system. However, it is not implied that mainstream practice is homogenous or its principles are not contested by teachers working with the national curriculum. Rather, statements in this thesis regarding the mainstream draw on its general schema, as it viewed by both its critics and, to the best of my knowledge, from the Waldorf community.

⁵ Apart from maths, English, languages and religion, subjects are taught intensively on a daily basis over a three to four week period; this is referred to as the "main lesson". A class teacher will teach the same class a range of main lesson subjects, including geography, for a period of normally eight years (from age 6 to 14).

as embedded in two main impulses at the heart of Waldorf's distinctive philosophy – the way understanding is reached (pedagogy) and the worldview that is constructed (knowledge content). Given my own position as a Waldorf teacher, I therefore felt the need to both celebrate Waldorf's holistic approach and reflect, more critically, on the potentially problematic areas of practice.

Whilst research on Waldorf education is broad and extensive (see 1.0), very few studies have focused on how its underlying philosophy informs classroom practice within specific curriculum areas, nor from the perspective of practicing class teachers. Furthermore, given that Steiner education has become the world's fastest growing independent school movement, with the possibility of wider state funding, interest in its holistic philosophy and practices has grown.⁶ Hence, from outside the anthroposophical community questions have arisen regarding the education's distinctive qualities, and, with the potential for mutual sharing and learning between sectors, whether aspects of classroom practice could be transferred to the mainstream (Woods et al 2005: 4).⁷ Within this climate the need to investigate Steiner education's esoteric framework and worldview has therefore emerged as an important and relevant area of educational research. With this in mind, and to inform a non-anthroposophical audience, I draw specifically on the Waldorf approach to geography, since this is a subject area that holds both a personal and professional interest, and is intricately interwoven with Steiner's broader philosophy.

However, as this research develops empirically, the complexity, and, at times, the ambiguity of the guiding philosophy emerges. What may therefore be initially considered, from a theoretical perspective, a universal Waldorf method of teaching, on closer inspection turns out to be individualized and diverse. In this respect the case studies considered below highlight the importance of personal interpretation and application of Waldorf's general schema; a crucial element of the Waldorf principle of

⁶ There are currently over 1000 Waldorf schools in 60 countries, (including such diverse cultures as Egypt, South Africa, Brazil and India). In the UK, where there are presently 31 schools, bridges between the Steiner-Waldorf movement and the mainstream have been recently established. For example, Plymouth University currently runs a BA teacher-training programme in Steiner Education. Another important initiative has been the recently developed Steiner Academy School near Hereford, UK, which secured state funding. State funding has been achieved in a number of countries (e.g. Germany and the USA).

⁷ This comprehensive DfES funded survey of Steiner education draws on many aspects of pedagogy and school management. Its main aim is to assess the scope for collaboration and sharing between Steiner and maintained schools, given the possibility, in the UK, of state funded "Steiner Academies". This draws on the DfES's diversity in education initiative (DfES 2001).

free classroom practice but one that remains largely unexplored. And it is the subjective dimension of practice that provides the second motivating factor for this study, for reasons related to two broad areas of the guiding philosophy - its holistic image of the child and the world. Through the challenge of working with these areas of knowledge two research questions arose.

Firstly, the Waldorf approach relies heavily on an imaginative pedagogy that complements Steiner's developmental understanding of the child, conceived in a metaphysical and organic sense as a fusion of body, soul and spirit (examined in chapter 1). From this conceptual framework an important question arises regarding learning discourse; in particular, how do teachers engage pupils on an imaginative and intellectual level? Lack of theorization of this dimension of learning from within Waldorf (apart from Steiner's original guidelines), together with the personal struggle to adopt a balanced learning strategy for preadolescent classes (documented in 3.2), inspired me to investigate this further. Secondly, and also embedded in Steiner's worldview, is the holistic form of curriculum knowledge. In the context of geography this translates into forms of representation framed primarily on the synthetic natural region, built up and transferred as a form of knowledge through descriptive narrative. Drawing again on the challenges encountered in my own classroom practice therefore led to a second question; in geography, what kind of worldview do teachers present to their class?

What may at first appear as separate pedagogical and curriculum questions, one relating to how pupils are led to understand the world and the other to the worldview presented, are, however, united on two levels within the Waldorf schema. Firstly, method and subject knowledge are interwoven by the education's non-dualistic worldview, which views the child and the world as evolving interdependent organisms (see below). Within this framework the geography taught to the child can only be understood in relation to the evolution of its cognitive faculty, and, within a metaphysical context, its spiritual development or earthly incarnation. Secondly, and related to practice, both elements unite in the classroom discourse involved in knowledge-building. As shown in the lesson transcripts below, in Waldorf's communicative (as opposed to a textually-based) method, knowledge is, at the same time, an imaginative transaction and a representation of the world. For this reason learning discourse is both a path to understanding, or a learning strategy, and the construction of a worldview (Alexander 2000: 430). Furthermore, in practice these two elements are consolidated by a method framed on the child's natural

rhythms.

To explore the philosophy underlying the Waldorf approach to geography this thesis therefore moves from an analysis of the conceptual framework guiding pedagogy and curriculum knowledge to its application, on a practical level, through classroom-based narratives and dialogues. Moreover, given the position of Steiner's universal philosophy, a route of critical inquiry emerges that focuses on its assumptions regarding intellectual development and geographical representation. On the one hand, questions arise regarding Waldorf's non-dualistic and essentially premodern view of the child united with the world on an imaginative level. Based on this understanding the Waldorf approach pays particular attention to the aesthetic and pictorial. However, whilst intentionally withholding from intellectual schemas may appeal as a child-centred learning method, it also raises questions. On the other hand, what appears as a premodern geography drawing on a unified view of man and nature raises issues regarding cultural and spatial representation in today's world.

Given the inevitable positioning of Steiner's worldview and the way this permeates Waldorf geography, consideration is given to the potential need for practice to be updated. Whilst Steiner's worldview is arguably unique in both its breadth and the degree of rigour with which it synthesizes the spiritual and the physical, as a discourse drawing explicitly on a metaphysically-framed understanding of human evolution and life-forms (including man, animals and region), it is ontologically challenging. Moreover, since Steiner presented his knowledge, the combined impulses of empirical science and the standardization of learning, as well as theoretical critiques of the positionality of knowledge, have radically changed the intellectual landscape (see 1.1). Thus, forms of pedagogy and curriculum knowledge embedded in spiritual frameworks, with non-quantifiable learning goals and focusing on the subjective and imaginative, have remained marginalized. However, the fact that Steiner education has endured and recently gained popularity is evidence of its continued relevance and appeal.⁸ This raises wider issues concerning Waldorf's holistic approach and which this research

⁸ There have been three main phases of development of Steiner schools in the UK. Firstly, those developed in the 1920s and 30s in response to the ideals of the original Stuttgart school (3 in this category). Secondly, schools founded in the 1970s and 80s that were motivated by the social ideals of the time (8 in this category). Thirdly, those developed since 1990, largely as a response to the level of assessment in maintained schools (11 schools at the time of writing). However, there are also a large number of emerging schools yet to be fully affiliated with the Steiner Schools Fellowship. Data from www.steinerwaldorf.org (Website for the Steiner-Waldorf Schools Fellowship). See also Woods et al (2005: 4).

also addresses.⁹

Firstly, with the increased importance of accountability and outside inspection (placing more emphasis on cognitively-defined learning goals) and the need to adapt its curriculum knowledge to suit the contemporary world, Waldorf education is required to be more reflective of its practices and able to accommodate change. Although an opinion that depends on one's personal view of anthroposophy and the potential impact of state funding and involvement, it is nevertheless increasingly likely that Waldorf schools' typically insular status will become eroded.⁸ Secondly, and an element highlighted in this thesis, is the reason for its endurance and growth. Essentially, Waldorf's holistic philosophy sustains its attraction as an alternative approach to how children should learn. Hence, as shown below, whilst aspects of teaching method and subject knowledge may be problematic, the learning experience, attuned to the child's stage of cognitive development and natural rhythms (of waking and sleeping), remains both powerful and engaging.

However, to reiterate the point made above, Steiner did not intend his educational philosophy to be a corpus of abstract knowledge that prescribes teaching method, but one that is worked with on a personal level to guide individual practice. Given, therefore, that theory merges with practice through its interpretation and implementation as a learning discourse, this research explores the educational philosophy by focusing on lesson context. With the notable exception of Nielsen's (2003) study of the Waldorf approach to English, research has not drawn directly, or in significant detail, on classroom talk to explore either pupils' learning experience or taught knowledge. For this reason, what emerges from the empirical part of this study is therefore also of use to the Waldorf teaching community.

Furthermore, in an attempt to engage in critical reflection of the Waldorf approach without losing sight of its deeper aims, and without wanting to undermine my own philosophical position, methodology remains sensitive to the wider learning context and its educational goals. For this reason case studies draw on both the experiential, lived experience of pedagogy as well as the geographical knowledge or worldview that

⁹ Given the wider possibility of state funding this is a particularly relevant issue, which, to some extent, divides the Waldorf community.

learning discourse constructs. This engages the reader with both the imaginative dimension of knowledge transaction as well as its culturally embedded meanings. Moreover, given my own philosophical and professional position this study progresses reflexively, beginning with an analysis of my own practice, which acts as a springboard to inquiry. However, attempting to research a holistic form of educational practice and from a position of immersion also raises complex issues regarding methodology. These are considered in chapter 3.

To achieve these aims this research follows a path that is reflected in the organization of the thesis. The inquiry is organized into two main parts; the first part focusing on Waldorf philosophy; the second on classroom practice. Whilst, as noted above, pedagogy and subject knowledge are interwoven and united in classroom discourse, their distinctive ontological and epistemological framework warrants close scrutiny. For this reason consideration is firstly given to the way teaching method is closely tied to Steiner's unique understanding of the child, drawing on key features of his metaphysical worldview (chapter 1). This is followed by a focus on the Waldorf approach to geography, exploring its holistic representation of the world and adaptation to the child (chapter 2). In both chapters the position of Waldorf within a wider intellectual field is also considered, drawing on anthroposophy as a distinctive philosophical position and worldview.

As the discussion of philosophy progresses connections are made between pedagogy and subject knowledge that highlight the holistic and anthropocentric nature of Steiner's worldview. Whilst this necessitates drawing on a range of fields (pedagogical theory, child development, philosophies of geography etc.), focus is maintained through reference to the anthroposophical archetypes, of the child and the world, that underpin this study.¹⁰ What emerges in this discussion, particularly regarding the archetypes' challenging ontological framework, also helps to focus my empirical study. An age-specific context for this inquiry, focusing on pre-adolescence (12 to 14 years), is also identified. The first section of this thesis therefore aims to both inform the reader and probe important areas of Waldorf's conceptual framework.

Exploration of the philosophy then proceeds through an analysis of various discourses

¹⁰ The notion of an "archetype", discussed further below, draws on the original indication given by Steiner of an organism's spiritual and physical constitution, which includes the human and earth organisms.

surrounding classroom practice, drawing on the principles of Waldorf's distinctive pedagogy (Woods et al 2005: 65).¹¹ This begins by considering a suitable methodology, given that the holistic learning method being investigated, as well as the epistemology guiding this inquiry, excludes certain procedures. With the intention of allowing understanding to develop organically, different forms of discourse are presented and interpreted in the order in which data was collected, and in a way that is sensitive to each context, and, in the case of lesson observations, the learning experience. Drawing initially on my own classroom practice, which helps to position my interpretive schema, the focus then moves to interviews with class teachers to explore their viewpoints, followed by observations of different main lessons (chapter 3).

In the latter, dialogue with teachers and the recording of classroom talk is an intrinsic part of the study, helping to build a picture of class context and lesson content. From this preliminary investigation certain aspects of practice emerge that both corroborate and deepen the philosophical themes discussed in the first two chapters. To explore these further, a more extended in-depth empirical study examines lesson discourse from three main lesson blocks on similar topics taught by different teachers. Given the challenges involved in teaching preadolescents using Waldorf's imaginative schema, focus remains on this age group (12 to 13 years). In these studies the dynamics of teacher-pupil exchanges involved in knowledge-building are considered in more detail, in particular how teachers' strategies integrate imaginative and more intellectually-defined or cognitive learning discourses. Further consideration is also given to the way Waldorf's pedagogical framework consolidates subject knowledge, or in the context of this study, the worldview implicit in the geographical representation. To highlight the importance of class context and teacher-pupil relations in the Waldorf system, these case studies build on more ethnographic data, as well as exploratory dialogues with both teachers and pupils.

Drawing in depth on classroom practice therefore enables further evaluation of Waldorf's philosophy. This is developed iteratively as interpretation of data progresses from context to context, and also reflexively, as comparisons are made between other teachers'

¹¹ A survey of teachers' views by Woods et al identifies the five most important features of Waldorf pedagogy as: 'grounding in child development'; 'the place of narrative in teaching'; 'the distinction between willing, feeling and thinking'; 'emphasis on the artistry of the teacher' and the 'organisation of teaching around the main lesson' (2005: 65). My empirical study draws on this general framework.

viewpoints and practices and my own. For this reason the position of my own voice within this thesis moves between the foreground and background, depending on lesson context and the theme in question. Hence, sections drawing directly on classroom practice, particularly my own lessons, involve more personal commentary than those focused on the general philosophical framework. Given my own involvement in Waldorf education, an interpretive position that assumes neutrality would be unrealistic. The best I can do is disclose my personal viewpoint by illustrating my approach to practice.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the nature of Waldorf philosophy presents challenges to any academic interpretation. Primarily, the explicit metaphysical and holistic worldview underpinning classroom practice does not lend itself to theoretical reduction. Given the uniqueness of each learning context and the diversity of ethnographic data, caution had to also be taken with attempts to generalize or reduce this complexity to a conceptual schema. For these reasons this research does not seek to make theoretical claims regarding learning method, as a controlled comparative study might, but to deepen understanding of the educational philosophy through description and analysis of the practice it informs. Through close attention to different learning contexts and the details of classroom discourse, knowledge is therefore generated about whose validity we can be 'reasonably confident' (Hammersley 1992: 50).¹² The philosophical assumptions underlying methodology, as well as this research's knowledge claims, are discussed in chapter 3.

Additionally, the holistic and universal nature of Waldorf practice makes it difficult to generalize on the whole school movement from examples of classroom practice in a specific cultural context. This research focuses on the Waldorf approach as it implemented in the UK. Whilst Waldorf's universal philosophy, particularly its holistic image of the child, makes it adaptable to different cultures (Maher et al 1995), a non-European school would, however, have to adjust its curriculum model of geography to suit its own location.¹³ The epistemological framework and worldview shaping this

¹² Hammersley's critique of the philosophical assumptions of ethnography argues for a 'subtle form of realism' as a position between relativism and naïve realism (1992: 50). Although based on a different philosophical framework from my own approach, this shares a similar ontological and epistemological viewpoint that knowledge of a universal reality, albeit partial and perspectival, is constructed from individual experience. See 3.1.

¹³ Waldorf schools outside Europe, for example, begin geography with a focus on their own home region and continent. However, this thesis does not explore how a non-European context might impact on subject knowledge.

knowledge is, however, the same the world over. Furthermore, this research focuses on one subject area and is therefore not meant as an evaluation of the child's general school experience or the curriculum as a whole. Although questions may arise regarding aspects of pedagogy and subject knowledge, Waldorf schools operate as integrated systems with many diverse and beneficial practices designed to educate the whole child. The generally positive emotional and social benefits to children of such an approach are, however, marginal to this study.¹⁴ Nevertheless, aspects of the wider emotional and social dimension of learning are implicit in both the empirical evidence presented as well as the theoretical review of the holistic learning process.

Finally, a note should be made of the terminology used in this thesis and the initial heavy use of footnotes. For the sake of brevity, the term "man" is used in the human-universal sense Steiner intended, and not in reference to gender. The notion of an "archetype", as indicated above, refers to a versatile imaginative picture rather than a rigidly defined concept. Thus, in the sense that an organism has a universal form, although individual forms differ, it is said to be archetypal.¹⁵ These, and other terms that have anthroposophical meaning, will be identified and elaborated as the thesis progresses. It is therefore stressed that certain concepts arising in the early stages of this text will have clearer meaning by the end. Regarding footnotes, these are mostly used to highlight the connections between aspects of Waldorf practice and Steiner's universal philosophy and worldview. These mostly draw on key texts that are studied by Waldorf teachers.

¹⁴ For example, Waldorf schools nurture close teacher-pupil and peer group relations. Craft activities, art and drama, are also integrated into the curriculum to balance the intellectual content. Seasonal festivals, based on Steiner's cosmogony, are an important part of the schools' yearly rhythm. See Woods et al (2005) for an overview of distinctive features of the school system.

¹⁵ In the sense that an imagination of a tree, for example, will reflect properties common to the species, but each observed tree of that genus, in its physical form, will be marginally different.

Chapter 1

Anthroposophy and Waldorf Pedagogy

1.0 Introduction

Steiner school practices are integrated with their guiding philosophy, or anthroposophy, which Steiner intended to lead man to an understanding of the spiritual in the universe. This worldview underpins the distinct character and organisation of the Waldorf school system (Armon 1997). Through the course of his life Steiner developed anthroposophy from an esoteric path into a body of knowledge drawing on many aspects of life, including child development and evolutionary theory.¹ However, it was only in 1919, with the founding of the first Waldorf school, that his ideas were directly applied to education. Anthroposophy then became the guiding principle for teaching practice in two fundamental ways; firstly, it offered a knowledge of the whole child, perceived as body, soul and spirit; secondly, it claimed to deepen subject knowledges according to its holistic worldview.²

Any study of practice in Steiner schools will therefore lead the inquirer to the impulse at the heart of its educational philosophy, which is grounded in anthroposophy's spiritual knowledge.³ Ontologically, the position of anthroposophy is clear. Whereas empirical science is limited to a knowledge of the physical world, in Steiner's mystical view reality extends beyond the sense-perceptible realm to a world of spiritual powers and processes. Based on a metaphysical image of the child, Steiner schools therefore offer an alternative to the economically and technologically framed agendas of modern state education, with its focus on pre-defined, rational learning goals and subject knowledges (Kelly 1994, Zipes 1995, Kiersch 2005). As a school movement embedded in a unified, spiritual worldview, Steiner education could be described as a premodern renewal of education. This is a view I will consider in the following section.

¹ Steiner presented his anthroposophy in over 6000 lectures and 30 written works. His main intention was to explain how spiritual processes work in the physical world. This knowledge has been applied in many fields apart from education, including art, agriculture, medicine, architecture, science, drama and religion. See Francis Edmunds: *An Introduction to Anthroposophy* (2005).

² It is important to note that pupils are not taught anthroposophy. This will become clearer as the thesis progresses.

³ In his key texts Steiner developed a spiritual epistemology and a knowledge of the spiritual world. These include: *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds - How is it achieved?* (1993), *Occult Science - an outline* (1994) and *Theosophy* (1989).

For the purposes of this thesis Steiner's spiritual philosophy requires some clarification. In this chapter I will therefore outline his non-dualistic theory of knowledge as the basis for Waldorf's imaginative pedagogy (1.2). This will show how Steiner's epistemology is fundamental to Waldorf's educational goals, including the way subject knowledge is shaped and presented. This is followed by a review of the anthroposophical understanding of child development and the importance attached to the imagination in learning (1.3). Although this chapter draws on Steiner's esoteric concepts, comparisons will also be made with other theories of child development (such as those of Piaget and Vygotsky), as well as the ideas of prominent educationalists which, to some extent, resonate with Steiner's. I will then consider the two most distinctive features of the Waldorf approach to knowledge construction - the rhythmic or repetitive structure of the main lesson and the use of a narrative (1.4). The chapter then concludes with a focus on the teacher's perspective of working with the philosophy and the key challenges that arise (1.5). The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the esoteric philosophy informing Waldorf's unique learning environment and, through this, to identify potentially ambiguous areas of practice. This will help to frame my empirical study.⁴

In order to situate this research, a brief overview of the wide-ranging literature on Waldorf education needs to be given. In general, texts fall into two categories. Firstly, those written from within the Steiner-Waldorf community that are grounded in anthroposophy and sympathetic to its educational goals (for example, Child's 1991 outline of Waldorf theory and practice and Finser's 1994 biographical account of class teaching). Although these guides on the curriculum and pedagogy are insightful, they tend not to draw on school-based empirical data in a rigorous way, nor do they engage in critical reflection. Secondly, academic studies that use empirical data to investigate Waldorf teaching practices or the wider school community. Generally, these adopt a range of methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, and focus on one of the following three areas: ⁵

- (i) *Aspects of Steiner's imaginative pedagogy and evaluation of its learning outcomes.*
(e.g. Uhrmacher 1993, Hutchingson et al 1993, Ogletree 1998, Cox et al 2000, Nicholson

⁴ The esoteric framework underpinning Waldorf pedagogy and subject knowledge remains largely unexplored in academic studies. For example, although the comprehensive DfES report on Steiner education highlights the importance of imaginative pedagogy (Woods et al 2005), little reference is made to the spiritual anthropology that underpins it.

⁵ I cite only a selection of texts to indicate the range of research. References to specific studies will be made at appropriate points below.

2000, Ward 2001, Nielsen 2003 and Ashley 2005). For example, in an attempt to develop a grounded theory of effective classroom practice, Nielsen conducts a phenomenological study of what he calls Waldorf's 'imaginative transaction' of knowledge (2003: 14). Cox et al, on the other hand, quantify and evaluate the drawing ability of Waldorf and non-Waldorf pupils (2000). Hutchingson et al's action research on gifted pupils in Steiner schools (1993) and Ogletree's quantitative study (1998) of the creative thinking ability of Waldorf and non-Waldorf pupils, evaluate and compare Waldorf methods and learning outcomes to the state sector.

(ii) Social and cultural aspects of the Waldorf learning environment, including its potential for wider application. These studies cover a range of themes, including teachers' self-development and moral training (Armon 1997), the use of ceremony and ritual (Henry 1992), adult learning in the school community (Stehlik 2003), the success of Waldorf schools in deprived areas (McDermott et al 1996), and the benefits of close relations between teachers and pupils on pupil integration (e.g. River and Soutter's 1996 study on school bullying). The epistemological impulse in Waldorf pedagogy has also been analyzed as a framework for imaginative learning on sustainability (Ashley 2005).

(iii) More critical analyses of curriculum content as well as the inertia and insularity of the Steiner school movement. Although the literature generally views pedagogy in a positive light, some studies throw doubt on the curriculum and its epistemological framework. For example, Jelinek (2003) questions the legitimacy of using Goethean phenomenology (see 2.1) as a method for contemporary science, whereas Golden's critical study of teacher narratives (1997) challenges the gender assumptions within the discourse. Other in-depth studies stress the need to adapt to new social and technological developments (e.g. Masters 1996) as well as acknowledging the tension between Waldorf fundamentalism and the modern world (McDermott 1996). Mazzone (1999) and Kiersch (2006) identify areas of tension in Waldorf teacher-training.

My own study, with its detailed consideration of pedagogy and subject knowledge, crosses these research fields. Furthermore, the tension between anthroposophical and academic discourse also arises as a recurrent theme in this thesis, in both my analysis of theory and investigation of practice.

Given the breadth of Steiner's worldview, I will limit my discussion to key aspects of the

philosophy that frames classroom practice. As with any study of practice informed by a universal philosophy, placing boundaries on a discussion of its conceptual framework presents challenges. Hopefully, however, the main principles guiding practice will be elucidated. To do this I draw on a selection of Steiner's educational lectures, literature from within the anthroposophical community and academic research.⁶

1.1 Anthroposophy: A Philosophy for a Premodern Renewal of Education

It is no fanatical idea of reform that prompts us to speak of a renewal in educational life, but we are urged to do so out of our whole feeling and experience of how mankind is evolving in civilisation and cultural life (Steiner 1995: 17).⁷

The development of the Waldorf school movement, from its inception in Stuttgart in 1919, has been traced in a number of studies.⁸ Rather than repeat this, I will focus on the salient aspects of the educational philosophy and why its appeal is growing. As indicated above, Steiner's educational ideas are gaining more importance internationally. Whereas the agenda for state education, for example, in the UK, has arguably remained turbulent and undergone a succession of reforms, the Steiner movement endures and gathers pace on a global scale, and in a way very close to its original form (Maher et al 1995, Oberman 1997, Woods et al 1997).⁹ What therefore distinguishes Waldorf's educational philosophy?

Scientific empiricism has come to dominate state-regulated education throughout Western Europe. From the science of education, teaching methods have been largely defined to deliver a corpus of prescribed subject knowledges, or curricula, to be rigorously assessed using standardised methods. With its emphasis on information exchange and mechanical recall, this system arguably educates the child to fulfil predetermined economic and political roles (Anyon 1980, Gatto 1993, Hart 2007). Criticized for its instrumentalism (e.g. Kelly 1994) and standardization (e.g. Zipes 1995),

⁶ Steiner gave over 200 lectures on education and therefore my references are selective. However, key principles emerge from the different lecture cycles.

⁷ This quotation is from Steiner's lecture cycle *Kingdom of Childhood* (1995), which is widely studied on teacher-training courses. In this text Steiner outlines his model of child development as the basis for subject teaching in the lower school. These lectures are the main reference in this chapter.

⁸ Yonemura (1989), Mazzone (1999) and Masters (1996) trace the development of Waldorf education.

⁹ Oberman (1997), for example, focuses on the way Waldorf education's representational images help to sustain its identity.

this approach to education has been condemned as formulaic, based on a narrow view of the child's needs, the intellect and the learning process. With the emphasis on the teacher as professional facilitator educating "rationally-thinking" children to achieve standardised learning goals, the role of imagination and intuition in teaching and learning has largely been marginalised (Gatto 1997, Eisner 1998, Glazer, 1999). In the sense that the formalization of education, particularly its stringent methods of assessment, subordinates the individuality of teachers and learners, it has been described as a 'modernising assault on our educational system' (House 2000) and a 'social violence against children' (Block 1997), and even 'soul murder' (Whitehead 1967: 57).¹⁰ Critiques of the modernist educational agenda and its focus on knowledge reproduction have been numerous (e.g. Gardner 1991, Hart 1997, 2007). As argued by Woodhouse (1996), modern education draws on a wider "paradigm war" between the competing worldviews of technocratic modernity and emerging new belief systems that are intrinsically ecological and holistic.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, and in response to state education's narrowly defined agenda, various progressive school movements have emerged in Western Europe and North America. Generally described as the 'New Educational Movement' (NEM), these sought to develop curricula and pedagogy from a broader range of educational aims, allowing for greater freedom and opportunities for individual expression, with alternative views of what constitutes learning and knowledge.¹¹ New empirically-based ideas of child development provided theoretical frameworks for these holistic approaches, as did various wisdom traditions (Miller 2006).¹² Despite drawing on a range of philosophies and practices, the NEM generally viewed education as a means to develop the whole person and improve society. Learning by doing (crafts etc.), outdoor education and pupil involvement in decision-making were some of the methods adopted by these more child-centred approaches.

Although the Steiner system also values freedom and views education as a force for social renewal, its philosophy distinguishes it from other alternative approaches (Ashley 2006). Whereas the NEM's tend towards 'experiments in practical democracy' based on the idea of the 'participant child citizen' who thinks in a similar way to an adult (Ashley

¹⁰ House (2000) and Block (1997) use these terms in the titles of their work.

¹¹ The international union of the New Education Movement was founded in 1921 as the World Education Fellowship. Steiner schools were not admitted until 1970.

¹² Educational thinkers who have inspired the NEM include Dewey, Rousseau, AS Neill, Montessori and Krishnamurti.

2006: 3), the anthroposophical view of the child is different. Founded on a 'cosmic spiritualistic anthropology' (Ullrich 1994: 11), its philosophy of freedom is grounded in Steiner's metaphysical worldview, or anthroposophy, and its non-linear model of child development (examined in 1.3). In 1919, in a climate of political upheaval, Steiner's ideas offered educational reform as part of a wider, radical solution to rebuilding a defeated Germany.¹³ In some respects this can be viewed as part of a general anti-rationalist neo-romantic revival; a reaction to the industrialization and mechanization of life that had begun before the war (Kiersch 2006). Other mystical thinkers, such as Meister Eckhart and Jakob Boehme also gained popularity during this time.

In this anti-modernist climate certain elements of Steiner's educational philosophy appealed. Foremost, Steiner believed that the child should be educated without state involvement, thus challenging education's primary intention to secure the survival of the adult in the modern age. Instead, Steiner intended his schools to be free and autonomous. Furthermore, as a philosophy for education, anthroposophy gave the educational process a deeper metaphysical and universal meaning, 'see[ing] the evolution of the human being and the world as a single unit engaged in an organic process of further development' (Kiersch: 16). In this respect Steiner's main educational aim was to nurture the child according to what he believed was its natural constitution and development, and as a preparation for its spiritual evolution. Education was therefore based on an image of the child centred in a universe full of meaning and, in this sense, it extended beyond any instrumental agenda. This framework raises questions regarding the nature of the philosophy underpinning the Waldorf approach.

As a non-dualistic spiritual worldview, anthroposophy challenges modernism's attempt to demystify the world through rational empirical science and technological advance. Although difficult to situate, in this respect it follows the European Romantic tradition in its claim that thinking can penetrate the hidden or metaphysical world. However, following the tradition of idealistic philosophy (Plato, Aquinas etc.) and the phenomenological method of Goethe, Steiner developed a clear epistemological framework (see below). This had strong links with early twentieth-century attempts to apply scientific methods of investigation to inner or spiritual experiences. Although, in this respect similar to the aims of Husserl's intentional phenomenology (1935) -

¹³ Steiner had already presented his ideas for a restructuring of the nation-state in his book *Towards Social Renewal* (1919), in which he advocated a cultural sphere free of government and economic control.

to transform the task of knowledge - Steiner's agenda was more ambitious, for two reasons. Firstly, not only did he present a worldview giving a detailed, integrated knowledge of the world and man, he also offered a path *to* knowledge; a cognitive training that aimed to reveal to man his position and task in an evolving universe. It was Steiner's intention that class teachers, through working with children, should engage with this path (see 1.4). Secondly, for the last twelve years of his life Steiner indicated how anthroposophical knowledge could be applied in various practical ways to regenerate modern culture (Lissau 1987).¹⁴

Anthroposophy, described as 'rationalised mysticism' (Ullrich 1994: 6), can therefore be viewed as a bridge between a premodern, teleological view of the world and the Enlightenment Project. On the one hand, it is "premodern" in the non-dualistic sense that it places man, and the child, in the centre of a cosmically-ordered universe. On the other hand, it is "modern" in the sense that it utilises reason, or the cognitive path of Western philosophy, to understand the world (rather than religious belief).¹⁵ Anthroposophy also relies heavily on notions of evolution and ideal practices. In essence, Steiner created his own monistic, universal-realist project; a knowledge to understand how spiritual processes work in the physical world. To some extent his ideas also resonate with postmodern views, particularly their emphasis on individualism and the corporeal foundation of thinking. However, although anthroposophy's broad appeal accounts for both its potential and relevance, its mystical dimension has arguably led to its marginalization as a philosophy.

Anthroposophy's understanding of the evolution of human consciousness permeates Steiner education. In Steiner's cosmogony, man (in anthroposophical lexicon, the "microcosm") is perceived as united with the spiritual cosmos (or "macrocosm") through the evolution of both the physical body and the cognitive faculty.¹⁶ Essentially, through

¹⁴ Steiner was originally engaged with the German section of the occult movement Theosophy. From 1913, however, in a bid to apply his ideas and regenerate western culture he formed the independent Anthroposophical Society. See Lissau (1987) and Edmunds (2005) for an overview of these initiatives.

¹⁵ In his autobiography: *The Course of My Life* (1925), Steiner documents how he struggled to rationalise his spiritual vision. This led to important philosophical works detailing his spiritual epistemology, most notably *Philosophy of Freedom* (1894, see 1.2) and, in the application of Goethe's phenomenological method, *A Theory of Knowledge According to Goethe's World-Conception* (1886). These ideas are considered below.

¹⁶ Details of Steiner's cosmogony and human evolution are presented in his lecture cycles *Theosophy of the Rosicrucian* (1981) and *The Evolution of Consciousness* (1991), as well as Steiner's written work: *Occult Science- An Outline* (1989). In short, Steiner explains the evolution of human consciousness with reference to historical "epochs" (each of approximately two thousand years duration), which broadly determine the boundaries of cognition. During ancient epochs (for example, the 'Egypto-Chaldean'),

the descent into matter (or incarnation into the physical body) of the human spirit (conceived by Steiner as the “I” or “ego”) over successive incarnations, human cognition has become physically embedded in the sense world.¹⁷ In Steiner’s view, this separation from the spiritual cosmos initiated an age of dualistic or materialistic knowledge (see 1.2.). For this reason, human thought, following the momentum of the Enlightenment, became increasingly rationalized or intellectual. From an anthroposophical perspective, this is reflected in modern education’s immersion in empirical science, which has become manifest in its framework of curriculum knowledges and cognitively-defined learning goals. Furthermore, this impulse accounts for the marginalization of the intangible spiritual element in education, a feature OfSTED (1994) identifies as an important part of the educational agenda. However, in Steiner education it is this dimension that essentially defines the image of the child and, as such, how the learning process is perceived, including the role of the teacher. Crucially, the spiritual framework also informs Waldorf education’s main task - to educate in freedom. Steiner clearly indicated that education must do more than impart knowledge and train the intellect:

We shouldn’t ask: what does a person need to know or be able to do in order to fit into the existing order. Instead, we should ask what lives in each human being and what can be developed in him or her? Only then will it be possible to direct the new qualities of each emerging generation into society. Society will then become what young people, as whole human beings, make out of the existing social conditions. The new generation should not just be made to be what present society wants it to become (Steiner 1969: 45)

To be a part of the anthroposophical project, education had to therefore nurture in freedom that which lives in the child, and emerges in its thinking process as its spiritual essence. It also had to recognize that the human being is physically and spiritually connected to the earth. Based on this non-dualistic worldview, Steiner developed an appropriate holistic pedagogy and outlined subject knowledges. At the heart of this project is the need to engage the child’s imagination, as the foundation for both free thinking and healthy physical development.

As the basis for education, this image of the child allows for the intellect to emerge naturally during the course of the child’s development. Until this happens, around puberty, knowledge is presented primarily in a descriptive, pictorial form. This invites the

human thought was governed by spiritual powers. In Steiner’s view, these have retreated over successive epochs to allow human thinking to develop in freedom. A self-reflective, intellectual impulse dominates human thinking in the present epoch, which emerged in the late fifteenth-century with the Enlightenment. According to Steiner, humans reincarnate in successive epochs.

¹⁷ Anthroposophical ideas regarding human constitution and evolution are explored further in 1.3.

child to think freely through its own imaginative faculty, without resort to intellectual schemata, in so doing developing its own relationship to the world through its aesthetic-feeling realm (see 1.3). According to Steiner, if intellectual learning strategies are applied too young there will be detrimental emotional and physical effects in later life. Other aspects of the Waldorf approach, including its unique class system, aim to integrate the child socially.

Steiner also defines the role of the teacher in a distinctive way. Whereas the science of education aims to transform the teacher into a “professional” who has acquired the necessary cognitive skills and classroom techniques to deliver a curriculum, the anthroposophical ideal is the teacher as “artist”. This means that teaching skills, including the construction of subject knowledges, are not determined theoretically or through detailed curriculum indications, but are developed autonomously and in relation to a class’s needs.¹⁸ A key element of this process, however, is an understanding of how the child’s changing inner nature, in the holistic sense understood by anthroposophy, affects its educational needs. This emphasis on the self-education of teachers through the ‘meditative deepening of acquired [anthroposophical] knowledge’ places the teacher on anthroposophy’s spiritual path, as Steiner intended (Kiersch: 17). It also attaches special significance to the teacher’s free, creative activity. This is acknowledged by Kiersch, a Waldorf educator, in his views on the state system:

Once spontaneity recedes it becomes all the more urgent to find a theoretical basis and scientific guidance for educational practice. The teacher as specialist and expert in teaching, familiar with methods, sceptical towards ideologies and old habits, schooled in handling ready-made teaching material, trained in the methods of objective assessment, sceptical of his personal characteristics, and consciously functioning as no more than a critic, a facilitator - this has for many years been the dominant goal of modern teacher training (2006: 12).¹⁹

In contrast, the notion of the ‘teacher-as-anthroposophist’ foregrounds the teacher in the creation and delivery of subject knowledges.²⁰ Without the use of textbooks or detailed curriculum indications, knowledge is shaped in a form that suits the age of the child and is taught using the narrative method. This relies heavily on description to build imaginative pictures, and hence the teacher’s own creative interpretation of the main lesson theme, which Steiner perceived as an artistic process.

¹⁸ However, as indicated below, there is a general framework for main lessons.

¹⁹ Kiersch (2006) outlines the importance of artistic training and self-development for Steiner teachers. This is considered in further detail in 1.4.

²⁰ There is no rule that a teacher must be an anthroposophist i.e. follow its spiritual path. However, it is required that teachers work with an anthroposophical understanding of the child.

In summary, much of what appeals about Steiner education lies in the universalism of its guiding philosophy. Built on an understanding of the human evolving in unison with the cosmos, anthroposophy is a framework for a premodern renewal of education, with its primary aim to help the child's soul and spirit take hold of the physical body, as a preparation for its development into adulthood. To the extent that Steiner's holistic vision transcends state agendas for education it has developed into a global educational movement adaptable to different cultural contexts (Easton 1997). Furthermore, in a climate of increasing state regulation, standardisation and fixation on narrowly-defined and rigorously assessed learning goals, it holds firm to the value of the individual and the reality of the spiritual. Autonomy and freedom in thinking are therefore principles intrinsic to its educational philosophy, for both teachers and pupils (Clouder 1998). However, being based on a universal philosophy, aspects of its positionality are inevitably problematic.

In conclusion, two important elements of Waldorf's underlying philosophy have been identified. Firstly, the need for an imaginative pedagogy based on Steiner's view of the developing child and how it thinks. Secondly, based on Steiner's worldview, the need for holistic subject knowledges. As this thesis progresses it will be shown that these two broad areas of anthroposophy, relating to both the child and the world, constitute the conceptual framework of a knowledge-building process intrinsic to the Waldorf approach to geography. In this chapter I will explore further Steiner's understanding of the developing child as the basis for how pupils are taught to think. Chapter 2 then focuses on curriculum content and the kinds of geography that Waldorf's underlying philosophy generates. Before this, attention needs to be given to Steiner's epistemology, which is integral to Waldorf's teacher knowledge, classroom practice and educational goals.

1.2 Steiner's Philosophy as the Framework for Pedagogy and Subject Knowledges

As established in the preceding section, Steiner education is embedded in a spiritual worldview. Although as a holistic alternative to the state system it has gained increasing popularity, particularly in the last thirty years, it has also generated strong criticism (Jelinek 2003).²¹ Ullrich, for example, describes the range of views on Steiner education,

²¹ The Waldorf critics website PLAN (People for Legal and Non-sectarian Schools), for example, highlights the strong views on Steiner education, including the belief that anthroposophy is a satanic cult. See www.waldorfcritics.org

ranging from ‘enthusiastic support and uncritical identification by his [Steiner’s] followers’, to ‘polemic and sweeping criticism by the representatives of academic research’ (2000: 1). In his view this typifies the paradox of Steiner pedagogy where:

one side emphasizes the meaningful practice of an all-round education designed to meet the needs of the child and overlooks the extra-sensory anthropology of Steiner.. the other side directs destructive criticism at this occult neo-mythology of education and warning against the risks or resulting indoctrination (in a worldview school); in the process it loses an unprejudiced view of [its] varied practice’ (2000: 24-25).

Negativity towards Waldorf has even led to the view that it is part of a cult that indoctrinates children in its beliefs (Woods et al 2005).

Such strong feelings towards Waldorf education are rooted in its ontological and epistemological framework. On the one hand, with its emphasis on freedom in the educative process, its aim is to empower both pupils and teachers. On the other hand, its universal philosophy is embedded in a powerful neo-mythological discourse. Given the impact this has on classroom practice, including both learning method and, particularly in geography, the worldview presented, this requires further consideration. In this section I will therefore focus on the philosophy underpinning teaching method, beginning with Steiner’s epistemology. It should be reiterated, however, that Steiner’s philosophy is open to interpretation, and, as such, does not prescribe a teaching method.

Whereas Steiner’s original theory of knowledge was argued in relation to the philosophical discourse of his day, his subsequent indications for education were grounded in what he generally called his “spiritual research” or, as a faculty of consciousness, “super-sensible cognition”. As such, the educational philosophy draws extensively on his metaphysical image of the child, described using anthroposophy’s esoteric lexicon. These two aspects of Steiner’s philosophy (one epistemological, the other claiming an objective knowledge of spiritual reality), complement each other and represent a progression in Steiner’s thought.²² In this sense his early thesis on the spiritual impulse in thinking became the epistemological foundation of a pedagogy supported by his esoteric knowledge of child development. Before focusing specifically on matters of the child and education, it is therefore necessary to consider Steiner’s original theory of knowledge and the importance it attaches to freedom in the thinking process.

²² Steiner developed his theory of knowledge in the mid 1890s. Although he gave indications regarding pedagogy as early as 1907, he lectured on this subject from 1919 to 1924.

In *Philosophy of Freedom* (1894) Steiner attempts to combine his own blend of Eastern mysticism with the Western idealistic stream of transcendental philosophy (inspired notably by Goethe, Schelling and Lessing). Here he argues that thinking is essentially a spiritual activity, or an integral part of the universe that unites the self, understood as a spiritual entity or the human individuality, with the world beyond it. In this sense dualistic knowledges, including those generated by scientific empiricism, are based on a misconception regarding man's relationship to the world:

Dualism is based on a misunderstanding of what we call knowledge. It divides the whole of existence into two realms [thought and matter], each with its own laws, standing outside and opposed to one another (Steiner 1992: 75).

Referring to Kant's idealism, Steiner argues that knowledge is circumscribed by self-imposed boundaries if we assume that the known world can only be an interpreted world (by conceptual frameworks, logic etc.). Constrained by a system of metaphysical absolutes, thinking, in a Nietzschean sense, will therefore always be limited and hence unable to penetrate a universal reality, or what Steiner generally termed the "world-content." In opposition to this dualistic view, Steiner proposed that by its synthetic nature, thinking, in its essence, establishes connections between things, and, in so doing unites subject and object. Purely in the natural act of cognition, or what Steiner calls 'thinking-observation of our percepts' (1992: 62), understanding is deepened and man comes to know his connection with the cosmos or the world beyond.²³

In Steiner's epistemology, thinking is therefore conceived as a part of the "world process" in which man and the universe are united. Although this view of knowledge, grounded in the act of perception, resonates with the phenomenology of Heidegger and Husserl, Steiner defines thinking primarily as a spiritual activity that, according to Welburn, 'takes us into domains beyond our own subjectivity or life-world.' (2004: 63). However, as Welburn notes, this spiritual dimension is not conceived in an abstract metaphysical sense, but as a 'dimension of our experience.. [that] we can become aware of by virtue of our qualities as human beings.. includ[ing] the connection through the senses or bodily aspect of the world' (2004: 65-66). Steiner's phenomenological project therefore moves from the subjective world directly experienced to a universal realm, or what Ullrich calls a 'universal realism' (1994: 5). This experiential dimension of Steiner's epistemology is summarized by Welburn:

What we know of the world depends on the fact that we are a part of the world and

²³ By "percept" Steiner means thoughts, images or sensations that come to us or are given.

have been shaped by it, so that from the beginning our nature and organisation become not a limit, but the actual key to the nature of the universe and what brought us into being (2004: 49).²⁴

This viewpoint will now be considered further.

From his monistic position Steiner argues that the human organs of perception, embedded in the “world process”, reveal two different dimensions of the universe. Firstly, they enable perception of the physical world. Secondly, thinking (also conceived as an ‘organ of perception’) reveals the reality behind surfaces: ‘The world produces thinking in human heads with the same necessity it produces blossom in a plant’ (1992: 58). In Steiner’s epistemology knowledge is produced when thinking unites with perceptual content. Crucially, however, the product of this union, the idea or concept, belongs as much to the world as to the person who thinks it:

The concept is that part of a thing which we receive, not from outside but from within. The agreement, the union of the two elements, the inner and the outer, is what is accomplished through knowledge’ (1992: 62).

According to Steiner this happens because thinking essentially synthesizes a world of varied sensations, in so doing uniting with the (perceivable) physical world’s metaphysical counterpart to reveal aspects of its hidden reality.²⁵ In Steiner’s view, knowledge can therefore extend beyond the visible object to the universal essence. Thinking, unfettered by abstract dogma, rules or conceptual schemata, and united with perception, is therefore the foundation of true understanding.

In *Philosophy of Freedom* Steiner therefore argues that dualistic knowledge, or the Cartesian separation of the I and the world, is determined by our bodily constitution as thinking spiritual beings. According to Welburn, Steiner’s ‘new vision of man’s place in the universe’ advances phenomenology’s non-dualist project by considering ‘how mind and matter came to be confronting each other in the first place’ (2004: 48). In Steiner’s view, in his natural conscious state the individual perceives the world (through its body-sense organisation) as an entity apart from itself. Sensory information therefore generates a materialistic knowledge. However, in his epistemology Steiner argues that this knowledge never fully satisfies the deep-seated, existential need for the I, or self, to unite

²⁴ For a detailed review of Steiner’s philosophical position see chapters 2 and 3 in Welburn: *Rudolf Steiner’s Philosophy and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought* (2004). Steiner’s understanding of the corporeal basis of knowledge is outlined in *Theosophy* (1908). This is considered in 1.3.

²⁵ Steiner’s interest in Goethean phenomenology, with its notion of the union of the idea, in its imaginative-pictorial form, with the (metaphysical) essence, became the basis of his spiritual epistemology. This is explored further below.

with the world: 'The human being is not organised as a self-consistent unity. He always demands more than the world, of its own accord, gives him' (Steiner 2000: 13). According to Steiner, this is because the self-in-thinking is spirit, and perceives the world of matter as essentially alien. In this sense, and in contrast to the Lockean tradition of Western thought and the scientific behaviourism this generated, the self is conceived as a spiritual entity that brings impulses from both the spiritual world and its previous earthly incarnations. Furthermore, it retains a connection with this world; an intuitive sense that 'we are a being within, and not without, the universe' (Steiner 1992: 14). In Steiner's view the task of knowledge, and anthroposophy in general, is therefore to bridge the world of spirit and matter, and in so doing, know how one works in the other.

In this philosophy freedom is therefore found in thinking's participation with the world experienced, when the individual makes 'world-content into our thought-content' from its own embodied position (Steiner 1992: 14). Commenting on Steiner's epistemology, Ashley describes it as 'the freedom to form concepts out of the reality in which we live as human beings - an ultimate form of individual sovereignty' (2006: 4). From another viewpoint it is understood as the ability to attain knowledge outside the boundaries imposed by empiricism, an approach that is limited by a fixed, objective and material reality (Nordwall 1980).

This view of thinking as a self-directed experience is the philosophical foundation of Waldorf's educational aim, which is to prepare pupils to become free-thinking human beings.²⁶ This has a direct bearing on both the way pupils learn and subject knowledges are developed. As such, rather than teaching closely defined knowledges or thinking skills, pupils are encouraged to develop ideas freely through their participatory experience of nature or, in the classroom context, through free cognitive and artistic responses to lesson content. In his analysis of how Steiner pupils are taught to think Oberski contrasts this approach, with its broad view of the intellect, to the predominantly cognitive curriculum of the mainstream (2006). Because, as Oberski indicates, Steiner perceives thinking as a part of nature, 'with the notable difference that we can learn to control and steer our own thinking', ideas are developed 'with nature, instead of about

²⁶ Perhaps contrary to popular opinion, freedom is not the method of Steiner education, but its goal (see Calgren *Education Towards Freedom* 1972). As shown below, classroom practices are highly structured and rely on strong teacher authority.

nature.. as an experience we can direct.’ In an epistemological sense, this aims to create concepts that encapsulate ‘real characteristics of the world around us, rather than logical abstractions’ (Oberski 2006: 339).

As the following section shows, the rationale for this approach is not based on a linear model of intellectual development, but one integrated with the organic development of the child’s physical and spiritual being. According to Steiner, thinking undergoes a metamorphosis before the intellect, as a faculty for rational thought, comes to fruition. In the context of teaching pre-adolescents, this places special emphasis on the transformation of knowledge into a pictorial form, to engage the imagination. Before considering how Steiner’s epistemology is integrated with his model of child development as the basis for an age-appropriate pedagogy, key features of his views on thinking will be outlined. The following epistemological principles are intrinsic to the pedagogy analyzed in this research:

(i) *Thinking is individualized through the relationship between the human spirit and the physical organism.*

In Steiner’s view, although the self (or I-in-thinking) is the element through which man draws on the objective or universal realm, the “soul” element (in which the I is seated, or in anthroposophical terms, incarnated) causes the individual to ‘think the general concepts in his special way’ (1992: 74). Concepts therefore unite with each person’s perceptual field of mental pictures and feelings and, as such, are individualized. Furthermore, because a person is positioned in body, place and time, he or she can only perceive and interpret a part of the nature of things. In light of this, Waldorf pedagogy encourages the personal rendering of knowledge through imaginative and artistic activity. The subjective element of thinking, or the freedom to interpret, is considered an essential expression of human individuality and development.²⁷

(ii) *Knowledge develops through a person’s relationship to the world.* Knowledge grounded in sense-perception and feelings unites the thinker with the world on a personal, intuitive level. Thinking based on conceptual schemata, on the other hand,

²⁷ In *Theosophy* Steiner describes how man ‘continually links himself [in] a threefold way with things of the world’ according to the three sides of his nature: ‘*Through his body [i.e. the senses] man is able to place himself for the time being in connection with things; through his soul he retains in himself [i.e. his feeling life] the impressions which they make on him; through his spirit [i.e. his thinking] there reveals to him what the things retain for themselves*’ (1989: 19). This understanding of human nature is explored in more detail in the following section.

has little connection with the world experienced and therefore remains abstract.²⁸ In an educational context, and to encourage the subjective rendering of knowledge, subject knowledges are presented in an imaginative-pictorial form. As shown below, this is achieved through the vivid description of nature and people, and in a way appropriate to the child's stage of development.

(iii) *Knowledge changes the knower.* Steiner perceived the I as an individualized, spiritual entity that undergoes transformations through the thinking process, as, in any encounter with the world, mental pictures are absorbed and united with a corresponding concept. As a principle of education, this means that different subject knowledges and forms of knowledge (e.g. abstract or pictorial) are thought to leave different impressions on the pupil, affecting physical and spiritual development.²⁹ Instruction is therefore thought to be either therapeutic or detrimental to the child's development and to also have repercussions into adulthood.

(iv) *Ideas are organic entities.* Emphasis on the transformation of knowledge into imaginative pictures allows ideas to develop organically. Steiner generally referred to such pictorial thought-forms as "living conceptions" that help to nurture a "living intellect". As a principle of education this relies on the use of descriptive narrative to construct knowledge, rather than its presentation in a textual form.

These principles clearly show that Steiner's epistemology resonates with phenomenological notion of natural perception, which foregrounds the lived body's natural capacity to 'synthesise, polarise and organise the perceptual field' (Wylie 2007: 185). As with other phenomenological positions (e.g. Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, etc.), this concept of the grounding of knowledge in subjective experience has been heavily criticized by poststructuralist views of the human subject, and therefore knowledge, embedded in cultural, economic and political discourses (e.g. Foucault, Deleuze, etc.). However, although from its metaphysical viewpoint Steiner presents an extra-discursive notion of the self, his ontological framework - the human individuality centred in a cosmically ordered universe - also supports an organic and fluid process of knowledge building. Furthermore, this philosophical framework suggests an area of potential tension

²⁸ The anthroposophical understanding of knowledge as relationship to the world is explored in detail by Welburn (2004, see chapter 2).

²⁹ Steiner's views on the effects of geographical education on the child are considered in 2.2.

in classroom practice, between the imaginative process, and, in a geographical sense, the representations it generates.

In the next section I will consider how the epistemological principles outlined in this section are integrated with Steiner's organic model of child development. In this view subject knowledge has to be presented in a way appropriate to the manner in which the child's spirit - the I or self - incarnates into the lower bodies and encounters the world through the cognitive process. In his analysis of Steiner's epistemology, Welburn argues that he 'moves away from static models of knowledge.. show[ing] the possibility of integrating epistemology with evolutionary development to restore the wholeness of man's world' (2004: 146). In Waldorf philosophy the cognitive faculty therefore develops, in stages, from the child's whole organism. This theoretical inquiry will therefore continue by focusing on more details of Steiner's esoteric knowledge, as the metaphysical framework that guides both pedagogy and shapes subject knowledge.

1.3 Steiner's Esoteric Model of Child Development: the Foundation for Waldorf's Imaginative Pedagogy³⁰

Our task is to introduce an education which concerns itself with the whole man: body, soul and spirit; and these principles should be known and recognised (Steiner 1995: 30).

In the previous sections consideration was given to Steiner's non-dualistic philosophy (anthroposophy) and its idealistic notion that knowledge, when generated intuitively from the free act of thinking, can develop in accordance with reality. As the epistemological impulse at the heart of Steiner education's approach to nurturing the intellect, this challenges the modernist scientific agenda of teaching closely-defined curriculum knowledges and thinking skills (Kiersch 2006: 10). In this section I will consider, in a more concrete sense, this epistemological position in relation to Steiner's holistic view of the child's cognitive development, as the framework for Waldorf's imaginative pedagogy and subject knowledges. At this stage attention therefore turns towards to the

³⁰ The term "model" is used with caution. It implies more of an imagination or archetype than a rigid conceptual framework. Steiner's image of the child was not presented as a definitive model as such, but one built up from multiple perspectives over numerous lecture cycles.

anthroposophical archetype or universal image of the child as presented by Steiner, rather than its interpretation by the class teacher. Towards the end of this section, however, areas of ambiguity regarding this model, which may also impact on practice, become evident. Whilst the Waldorf method of learning has been the theme of a number of empirical studies, as indicated above, little consideration has been given to the esoteric anthropology underlying it. For this reason attention will now turn towards Steiner's metaphysical image of the child. This will be followed by comparisons with other developmental theories as well as non-Waldorf views on imaginative pedagogy. I begin, however, with the anthroposophical viewpoint.

As discussed, the rationale for the Steiner approach to teaching and learning can only be understood in the wider context of the anthroposophical view of human development. Central to this position, and following the streams of Romanticism, idealism and wisdom tradition (from Aristotle to Leibnitz, Goethe, Novalis, Schiller, etc.), is the notion of a "higher man" (the self, ego or individuality), that Steiner believed emerges from the spiritual world and incarnates into the physical body (Lievegood 1985, Steiner 1989).³¹ In this view, the essence of man's being is not considered an adaptation to life but a self-directed entity that, at our present stage of evolution, needs to develop in freedom. For the education of the young this means addressing the inner or soul life in such a way that the "higher man" can evolve unimpeded. According to Steiner, for this to happen teachers must allow the child's inner nature to determine how he or she should be taught. Steiner's interpretation of "spirit", "soul" and "body" and knowledge of their dynamic interrelationship define this inner nature in a particular way. From his numerous lectures on education he developed an archetype of the child with three distinct stages of development.³² This model is the framework for teacher-training courses, school organization, as well as the rationale for age-appropriate pedagogy and subject knowledges, including geography. It should also be emphasized that it is freely interpreted by class teachers, as my empirical study shows.

Before considering this model, it should be noted that implicit in Steiner's image of the child are the epistemological, ontological and evolutionary assumptions of

³¹ This aspect of man's being is similar to Aristotle's concept of "entelechy". See Lievegood (1985) for details of Steiner's esoteric anthropology.

³² The main lecture cycles I draw on are: *Kingdom of Childhood* (GA 311), *Education for Adolescents* (GA 302), *Study of Man* (GA 293) and *Education of the Child* (GA 34).

anthroposophy. Firstly, as previously noted, whereas Steiner claimed his knowledge drew on his spiritual research and is therefore explicitly metaphysical in nature, it can also be corroborated, in an empirical sense, by observation. In this respect he repeatedly drew links, however tenuous, between the child's hidden inner life and outer activity and development, as well as the world at large. The phenomenological basis of this knowledge, an unorthodox form of empiricism, arguably adds to its validity (Childs 1991: 22-23). From a scientific-empirical viewpoint its metaphysical reference is, however, challenging. Secondly, in common with Piaget, Steiner's model relies on the notion of natural stages in the child's cognitive development. Although understood in a different way, this draws on anthroposophy's evolutionary principle, which considers the child's changing consciousness to be a recapitulation of the historical progression in human thought. As a principle guiding the curriculum, and one particularly important for geography, this has important ideological overtones (considered in chapter 2).

As previously shown, Steiner's view of the child is embedded in a premodern, unified conception of man and the cosmos, in which the human spirit, having a pre-natal origin in the spiritual world, incarnates into the physical body. At conception this hidden body is thought to unite with the embryo and begin shaping the physical organism. Steiner's model relates key changes in the child's physical, emotional and cognitive development to the three-fold organisation of this spiritual entity and the way it gradually takes hold of the physical body. What is observed in outer appearance, character and actions is therefore considered a manifestation of the child's spiritual being. In a similar way, the earth is also perceived as being integrated with the spiritual universe. Steiner envisaged both realms (man and earth) as being united in a complex, metaphysical system. One dimension of this holistic worldview is the idea that the human being is a synthesis of what is spread out in the world i.e. the world is in man, and man is in the world.³³ According to Steiner, subject knowledges should draw on these connections: 'By relating the outer world to the human being we stimulate their feelings, and this is very important' (Steiner 1996, GA 302: 24).

In the anthroposophical schema the universal human nature consists of three bodies (apart from the physical body). Before considering matters of child development and pedagogy the nature of these bodies needs clarification. In the esoteric terminology of

³³ Details regarding human physiology and soul nature, and their relationship to the animal kingdom are given in *Man as Symphony of the Creative Word* (1991). See also 2.1 below.

anthroposophy they are defined as: ³⁴

- an “etheric body” of life forces that shapes and regenerates the physical body, holding the material substances in a certain form. According to Steiner, the etheric body ‘is a force-form; it consists of active forces, and not of matter’ (1965: 13-14), acting also as the movie screen or photographic record of our mental images and memory pictures. This body is closest to the earthly world and only leaves the physical body after death. As the human physical body corresponds to the earth’s mineral realm, the human etheric body corresponds to the plant kingdom. In Steiner’s view the etheric body, as the vessel for memory, should only be intentionally engaged in the learning process after the change of teeth.

- A “sentient” or “soul body” that enables consciousness and a personal inner life of thoughts and feelings.³⁵ According to Steiner it is ‘the vehicle of pleasure, of impulse, craving and passion- all of which are absent in a creature consisting only of physical and etheric bodies’ (1965: 12). Through its connection with the physical body (through the senses) and the spirit (through thinking), the soul body, perceived as the middle realm, acts as a bridge between spirit and matter. In Steiner’s view, as the soul body incarnates between the change of teeth and puberty it causes a metamorphosis in the way the child thinks and should therefore only be engaged directly, in its capacity as the vessel for rational thought, once it is freed from the physical organism, as indicated by puberty. In the sense that thinking and feelings are united through this body man shares it with the animal kingdom.

- A “spirit body” (the I, self or ego).³⁶ A body of pure spiritual substance and the highest to incarnate into the human being, the spirit body bestows on each person its stamp of individuality (physiological features, character, motivations etc.). On a cognitive level, the spirit body, as the I-in-thinking, has two faculties. Firstly, it enables reflective thought or the capacity to transcend the feeling life of the soul body, setting the human apart from the animal kingdom. Secondly, it allows man to connect with the divine in

³⁴ Steiner presents a detailed picture of the human being in *Theosophy* (GA 9: 17-45).

³⁵ Also known as the “astral body” this corresponds with Jung’s “psyche”. According to anthroposophy the soul body leaves the physical body during sleep.

³⁶ This body loosely corresponds with Jung’s “higher” or “authentic self”.

nature through his own consciousness. In Steiner's view this higher member unfolds in stages and begins to speak to the person from within during adulthood. In childhood, however, it emerges only in an embryonic form, initially physiologically (in uprightness) and then as the capacity for reflective thought. Like the soul body, it is thought to bring impulses from the spiritual world and previous lives. It only exists in an individualized form in the human being (Steiner 1989: 35-41).

Steiner interprets child development in relation to how these three bodies permeate each other as they incarnate into the physical body, to enable their existence in a world of matter.³⁷ An indication of the trauma involved in this process was given in the following address to a group of teachers:

Suppose you people were suddenly condemned to remain always in a room having a temperature of 144° Fahrenheit? You couldn't do it! It is even harder for the spirit of the child, which has descended from spiritual worlds, to accustom itself to earthly conditions. The spirit, suddenly transported into a completely different world, with the new experience of having a body to carry about, acts as we see the child act (Steiner 1995: 24).

Given this view of the human condition, the general aim of Steiner education is to enable the child's spirit nature to come into harmony with its earthly body and the physical world.

Based on this general principle of incarnation Steiner identified three stages in the development of the child's consciousness. As shown above, this model is the framework for age-appropriate learning methods, subject knowledges and school organisation. For the purposes of this thesis more attention will be given to the second phase of childhood.

Early Childhood (corresponding to the kindergarten). Before the change of teeth, the etheric body is thought to be moulding the inherited physical body in its own likeness, as the physical body's 'inhabitant and architect' (Steiner 1969: 12). Although the "physical-etheric" child is enclosed in what Steiner calls a spirit-soul "sheath", these higher bodies are yet to incarnate. At this stage the child therefore has no developed independent self-reflective thought life. Instead, according to Steiner, the infant's consciousness exists primarily in its bodily relationship to the world, being 'almost wholly sense organ', in that it absorbs external impressions directly into the physical organism (Steiner GA 311,

³⁷ See Salter, *The Incarnating Child* (1987).

L2: 33). Existing in a unity with the external environment, as it did in the spiritual world, the child is considered to be essentially imitative, instinctively believing its surrounds to be true and good.

Waldorf Education for infants does not therefore aim to engage the child in cognitive thought. With consciousness considered to be dream-like and the child most awake in its limbs, rather than the head, activities are directed towards the physical body by engaging the will (for example, by rhythmic movement). To call on the powers of thinking and memory would prematurely engage and interfere with the work being done on the child's physical organs by its etheric body. Steiner's philosophy is very clear regarding the damaging effect of any intellectual instruction in early childhood. Describing the impact of learning the alphabet before the change of teeth, he warns:

It really has no value whatsoever, and the whole soul of the child is spoilt by it. Even down into the physical body, right down into the physical health, the child is ruined (Steiner 1995: 35).

Rather than being taught knowledge, pupils are told imaginative stories. The priority in the kindergarten is to have teachers worthy of imitating and an environment that makes a healthy impression on the child.

The Middle Period (6 to 14 years, corresponding to the lower school). According to Steiner, the change of teeth marks the liberation of the etheric body from its activity shaping the inherited physical body according to its own nature. The etheric body then becomes an activity of the soul, engaged in the formation of mental images. Two other important spiritual processes are also thought to affect the child during this period. Firstly, the soul body begins to take hold of the physical body and work on the inner organs.³⁸ Less surrendered to the external environment, the child therefore becomes both physically strengthened and more autonomous in its thinking. Secondly, the ego begins to incarnate into the etheric and soul bodies. As such, the child becomes more conscious of how his or her own nature is different to the external world.

Describing this awakening to the world, Steiner called for teachers:

to observe how, little by little, curiosity and a longing for knowledge begin to show themselves.. It is only at the change of teeth that the situation alters. You must now notice the way the child begins to ask questions (Steiner 1995: 30).

³⁸ For details on this stage of incarnation see Lecture 6 in *Kingdom of Childhood* (1995).

Fundamentally, this awakening is experienced ‘not as a thought that emerges, but an image, albeit a soul image, an imaginative picture’ (Steiner 1995: 40). In Steiner’s view, therefore, there is no linear progression in the child’s cognitive development, but a stage when the child’s consciousness is essentially pictorial. Consequently the child is not naturally predisposed to cognitive thinking or learning. Rather, the intellect should only be engaged indirectly through the imagination.

The rationale for this is embedded in Steiner’s philosophy of imagination, a key element of Waldorf pedagogy which requires some attention. In Steiner’s esoteric psychology the predominance of the imagination during this period is related to soul processes and their connection to the physical body (Steiner 1990: 26-40). According to this model, because the soul (the vehicle of consciousness) is closely connected to the chest and rhythmic system, the child’s thinking is united with its feeling life, of which the imagination is a metamorphosis. To understand the principles underlying this model requires a consideration of Steiner’s idea of the soul’s embodiment and functioning. Central to this model is the notion of bipolar soul processes, termed “antipathy” and “sympathy”, from which two realms of consciousness originate - the cognitive and imaginative. In Steiner’s view these faculties generate both dualistic and non-dualistic thinking, representing different (human) relationships to the cosmos. They are fundamental to the pedagogic process of knowledge-construction investigated in this thesis.

On the one hand, the antipathetic tendency to reject the spiritual cosmos (out of which the child is thought to originate, but is cut off from) results in thinking’s inability to penetrate this realm. In place of spiritual perception is therefore cognition, which Steiner described as ‘reflections of pre-natal experiences’ (Steiner 1990: 32). Through this faculty, which has its physiological foundation in the “nerve-sense” system (centred in the head), perception is limited to the earth’s exterior physical form. According to Steiner, since this “head” quality of thinking consists primarily of mental substance, with little feeling, thinking is drawn into our purely physical relationship to the earth. Steiner associated this with the cognitive or intellectual faculty and abstract, conceptual thought-forms.

On the other hand, the sympathetic tendency to unite with the spiritual cosmos or what he calls “post-mortem reality”. Steiner relates the faculty of mental picture-forming to the intensification of this process, portraying the imagination as the element of “will-in-thinking” that contains the “germ seed” of spiritual reality. Through the sympathetic

tendency to unite with the world, thinking is therefore drawn towards the cosmos.

According to Steiner this dimension of consciousness is associated with the will and, physiologically, the “metabolic-limb” system, with a strong connection to the blood.

Furthermore, it is the balance of these two opposing forces that determines the range of human perception, both outward and inward. On one side, the pure will impulse of the sympathetic tendency is withheld by the antipathetic impulse of the nerve-sense system. Unable to unite with the spiritual cosmos man therefore remains only conscious of the physical world.³⁹ On the other side, the right degree of sympathy prevents the immediate rejection, by the antipathetic impulse, of the inner, mental image. Standing between the two opposing forces, and considered a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds, is the imagination. According to Steiner ‘when we make mental pictures we have what is cosmic within us’ (Steiner 1990: 35).

Returning to Steiner’s image of the developing child, a threefold conception emerges based on the faculties of thinking, feeling and willing, with teaching and learning determined by the dominant faculty. Whereas in infancy the sympathetic tendency of the will impulse dominates, with the child united with the world through bodily movement and imagination, during the middle period, as the child begins to withdraw into its soul life, the faculty of feeling dominates. Furthermore, because at this stage the soul body is thought to have a strong connection with the rhythmic-circulatory system (and hence the blood), the sympathetic or imaginative tendency predominates. After puberty the antipathetic or cognitive faculty then prevails.

This notion that thought develops in relation to the child’s whole bodily organism, from willing, then feeling, and to eventual liberation as an intellectual or reasoning faculty, is the rationale for Waldorf pedagogy. Viewing the intellect as a faculty emerging organically as the soul takes hold of the physical body underlies the principle of readiness to learn. According to Steiner, in its embryonic state the intellect must therefore only be addressed through images:

..in education and teaching you [the teachers] must address yourself to whichever system is predominant in man; thus between the change of teeth and puberty you must address yourself to rhythm in the child by using pictures. Everything that you

³⁹ According to Steiner, the blood and nerve element are held in balance (in the eye) in the act of perception (1995, Lecture 2).

describe or do must be done in such a way that the head has as little to do with it as possible, but the heart, the rhythm, everything that is artistic or rhythmic must be engaged (Steiner 1995: 131).

Based on this view, to engage the imagination allows the soul body to incarnate in freedom. Since the rhythmic system is naturally dominant during this period the pupil will never tire from forming mental pictures. This is not the case if the child is called upon to think rationally and exercise reasoning powers.⁴⁰ Moreover, nor will the intellect remain undeveloped if it is not directly engaged, as indicated by one Waldorf educator:

It is quite impossible to overdo the artistic presentation of lesson material because the child will begin to intellectualize such material independently to its own needs. This means that its intellectual growth is in no way forced or stimulated to an excessive degree, and moreover its conceptual thinking is rendered more mobile and more vital (Childs 1991: 89).

Although this view of the imagination is grounded in Steiner's esoteric view of the developing child, it resonates with other views upholding imaginative forms of pedagogy. As Nielsen notes, Steiner's philosophy of imagination aims to engage pupils in a different experience of learning:

As Steiner deduced, the realm of imagination not only has the ability to function as a bridge between idealism and realism, spiritualism and materialism. It also has the ability to connect the various components of, and within, the human being itself. Moreover, the pedagogical transaction of imagination has the capacity to let students 'rise' above any limitations of 'context' and place them in a type of 'trance', or imaginative mode', seemingly connecting them with inner, spiritual-aesthetic dimensions or experiences (2003: 14).

Through what Nielsen terms a 'bridge to wholeness' (2003: 14) the imagination, infused with feelings, transcends the verbal-analytical or rational and unites with the subconscious "soul-aesthetic" part of the human being. The synthetic quality of imagination has been viewed as a potentially fertile ground for education by different theorists writing over a number of decades. These views also challenge, from their different perspectives, modernism's focus on standardized rational-intellectual learning strategies and forms of information acquisition (e.g. Hart 2007).

For example, in his theorem of the transliminal mind, Rugg (1963) identified a middle realm between the unconscious and conscious state where intuitions or "felt-thoughts"

⁴⁰ Steiner relates metabolic and circulatory illnesses in later life to intellectual forms of education (1998, 302a, Lecture 3).

occur. Here, thinking is permeated with impulses from the subconscious feeling realm and illuminated. According to Rugg, the imagination essentially operates in the act of letting go of the rational mind so that a realm higher than conscious thought, or the “higher self”, can enlighten thinking and allow discovery, as opposed to merely verifying. In Rugg’s view education should therefore focus on the imagination to generate knowledge and stimulate insight. In a similar vein, Neville (1989) argues that it is only by engaging the latent imaginative faculty of the psyche that thinking and learning becomes truly creative. Although framed differently, to some extent these views resonate with Steiner’s notion that through the imagination the individual, in a metaphysical sense, draws on something closer to reality.

As Nielsen notes, other philosophies of the imagination also resemble Steiner’s (2003: 15). Sloan (1983), for example, views the imagination as a bridge between the polarized activities of thinking and willing. Whereas thinking, on the one hand, essentially separates us from the world, through our will activity we automatically and unconsciously unite with it. Between the two realms, the feeling-based imagination acts as a rhythmic connection that deepens thinking and unites the person with the world. This compares with Steiner’s notion of imagination as the unifying will impulse in thinking, as outlined above.

Such views make the assumption that the imagination unites spirit and matter. Whereas the intellect can only verify what already exists on a purely physical level, the imagination, as the vehicle of higher consciousness, can discover hidden truths. On the surface this view assumes a duality between intellectual and pictorial forms of thought. Steiner too, appeared to make a similar epistemological assumption: ‘Whereas the intellect never really penetrates as deeply into reality and remains always on the surface, the faculty of imagination is rooted in reality’ (Steiner 1995: 136). Although this would seem to contradict his argument that thinking is essentially a spiritual activity, in Steiner’s epistemology the intellect is portrayed, in a living and imaginative form, in a dynamic relationship with lived experience (Welburn 2003). In this sense thinking naturally oscillates between two poles; either withdrawing from the world through the antipathetic impulse to form concepts, or uniting with the world through the synthetic act of forming images. Steiner therefore views the imagination as more than a realm of fantasy, but as the faculty through which the world is both intuitively understood and

personalized, in a phenomenological sense, through lived experience. However, since the vehicle through which this union of spirit and matter is realized (the corporeal body) is constantly changing, the role of imagination in the cognitive process has to be understood in relation to the child's developing organism.

The imagination is therefore viewed not so much in a dualistic relationship to the intellect, but as a faculty integrated with cognition and enriching understanding. In his discussion of imagination in pedagogy Mepham, a Waldorf educator, notes that

the distinction between image and concept is one of degree, not type. The continuum of mental picturing includes the fantastic image, the concrete picture and the abstract concept (2004: 6).

And it is through the 'concrete picture' that experience of the world is internalized and interpreted, or captured in thought as a dynamic process:

Imagination is integral to thinking activity.. is present in the process and activity of formulating concepts. When images are employed, the concepts are mobile and unfinished and therefore have a tendency to change and evolve (2004: 6).⁴¹

It is therefore in the alchemical process where image and thought combine, rather than the definitive concept, that knowledge gains meaning. According to Mepham, in this process of "emotional cognition" the pupil shapes knowledge and makes it his own:

Whereas a fixed concept is finished, completed and ready for comprehension and assimilation, an image, picture or metaphor is never the finished article. Likewise, the most important feature of a story or image is the space that is left- a space in which the learner can be inwardly mobile and active in order to find meaning and create understanding' (2004: 5).

Other, more prominent educationalists have expounded similar views on the importance of imagination in learning. For example, Dewey also conceived the imagination as the medium through which thoughts unite with personal experience to gain meaning and enable understanding: 'Only a personal response involving imagination can possibly procure realisation of even 'pure' facts' (1916: 236). Likewise, in his call for alternative "aesthetic modes of knowing" in lieu of the purely rational, Eisner views the faculty of imagination as pivotal (1998: 9-43). Challenging the narrow view of the intellect as pure mind activity embedded in language and verbal-analytical skills, Eisner argues that through imagination, which he calls a 'cognitive operation' (1998: 24), thinking gains meaning through the assimilation of experience. A 'biological basis for thinking and learning' should therefore intentionally employ the imagination to 'work with qualities

⁴¹ Research article from Waldorf Researchers and Educators Network (WREN) website (www.cswe.org).

we have experienced' (1998: 23). As Eisner stresses, the marginalisation of aesthetic forms of knowing in secondary education reflects a disembodied and standardised approach to learning:

If schools aim at cultivating intellect, those whose aptitudes lie in forms of thinking that are excluded from the accepted concept of intellect will also be excluded from a place in our educational sun (1998: 22-3).

Referring specifically to the imagination he adds:

One would think, given the importance of imagination, that it would be regarded as one of the basics of education. As you know, it is not on anyone's list of basics.. We are far more concerned with the correct replication of what already exists without cultivating the powers of innovation or the celebration of thinking (1998: 26).

Furthermore, imagination cannot be captured by 'the standardized objectives measured by standardized tests' (1998: 23). Similar views on the importance of imagination in learning are held by a number of other writers, for example Warnock (1976), Egan (1990) and Fisher (1993).

These views share the concern that, to a large extent, the standardized process of state education depersonalizes learning by teaching prescribed knowledges using a narrow definition of the intellect. Alternatively, foregrounding the imagination in knowledge acquisition, whilst sacrificing the standard or the political, upholds the personal and creative. This is because imaginative thinking is essentially a transformative process that relies on the individual rendering of knowledge rather than a mechanical assimilation, or being told how or what to think (what Hart calls the 'currency of information' 2007: 15). As the expression of the soul-aesthetic realm in the cognitive process, it therefore challenges performance-orientated learning strategies or assessment, relying instead on freedom to interpret. In the sense that Whitehead described it, to foreground the imagination in learning is to open up a space for 'freedom in the presence of knowledge' (1967: 30), a space that Hart argues 'enables insight and discovery' (2007: 56).

This notion of the integration of imaginative-pictorial and cognitive ways of knowing resonates closely with Hart's concept of the "analytic-intuitive dialectic". In *From Information to Transformation* Hart argues that the modernist educational agenda of information acquisition and the adoption of scientism's 'rational-positivist knowing', or 'analytic cognition' (2007: 75), marginalizes the natural, intuitive process and leads to 'alienation' and even 'mental health concerns' (2007: 71). Inspired by the intuitive

thinking adopted by various wisdom traditions and philosophers (e.g. Goethe, Nietzsche and Krishnamurti) he argues that, as an alternative, “non-rational” thinking should be encouraged and integrated with the rational to generate knowledge and deepen understanding:

Thinking and intuition function naturally and optimally in a dialectic that lives at the heart of the knowing intellect.. integrating the intuitive [is] significant for the educational journey (Hart 2007: 86).

Although referring to the imagination as only one dimension of intuition, this notion of a dialectical relationship between two forms of knowing is a useful conceptualization of the interplay between imagination and cognition in the learning process. In Hart’s view, and one that resonates very closely with Steiner’s, this calls on both “egoic-rational cognition” and a realm more transcendent or beyond the conscious self. Furthermore, allowing the interaction of these realms enables knowledge to develop not in a ‘linear or linguistic form’ but in a ‘more deeply integrated and fluid process’ (Hart 2007: 74). Intuitions, including images, emerge and are therefore given clear definition by the I-in-thinking or reflective process: ‘The analytic can frame problems for the intuitive, translate vision into form, help to interpret and deepen results’ (Hart 2007: 77). In Hart’s view, it is through the integration of both intuitive and analytical modes of learning that intelligence is cultivated and education renewed (see also Healy 1990, for a similar viewpoint). This notion of an integrated or balanced learning process is a key aspect of the Waldorf approach to knowledge-building explored in the empirical part of this thesis.

Although Hart’s holistic view of the learning process is similar to Steiner’s there are fundamental differences. On the one hand, Hart’s “analytical-intuitive” process broadly resonates with Steiner’s notion of “individualized concepts” (1.2), in the way it unites the personal or affective and conceptual or predefined elements of learning. On the other hand, Steiner’s image of the developing child foregrounds the imagination in learning in a more explicit way. Whereas Hart implies that the child’s ‘sophisticated reasoning’ and ‘radical questioning’ can work in tandem with the intuitive (2007: 81), Steiner’s non-linear view focuses clearly on the imagination in lieu of the cognitive-rational faculty up until puberty. As shown, Steiner did not consider the child to have the capacity to think like an adult, but in a way totally embedded in its state of being. This condition, dependent on the process of incarnation, determines the way the imagination mediates between the worlds of spirit and matter. According to Steiner, as the child develops and consciousness becomes more embodied, the imagination becomes increasingly engaged

with the life of experience. To understand why this happens it is necessary to consider another dimension of Steiner's metaphysical image of man - the I or ego.

Returning to Steiner's child archetype, it is useful to note that whilst Waldorf pedagogy works primarily with the imagination, as an intrinsic part of the cognitive process, this faculty is thought to evolve during the middle period of childhood. This has a significant impact on pedagogy. In Steiner's model of cognitive development the incarnation of the ego into the lower bodies has a major effect on how the child thinks about itself and the world, including the role played by the mental pictures. Three stages of consciousness are identified that are defined by the nature of the child's awareness:⁴²

- *From 7 to 9½ years.* Still unable to fully differentiate his own being as an entity separate from its surrounds, the child remains immersed in a unified or 'magic-animist' consciousness (Ullrich 1994: 19). With the imagination being inwardly creative in fantasy, rather than grounded in perceptual content, knowledge is presented largely in the form of myths, tales and nature stories.⁴³
- *From 9½ to 11½ years.* Steiner relates the incarnation of the ego (initially into the ether body) with the child's emerging awareness of being separate from the external surrounds (from an anthroposophical viewpoint described as "crossing the Rubicon"). However, consciousness is not, as yet, clearly focused on the physicality of the world, but more immersed in the subconscious, feeling life's response to the external world, and hence its livingness. In Waldorf education, during this period attention is therefore firstly drawn to the plant and animal kingdoms and their relationship to man. Subject knowledges (botany, geography etc.) represent the world holistically as an organic entity using 'naïve-realist' concepts (Ullrich 1994: 19).⁴⁴
- *From 11½ to 14 years.* According to Steiner, through the deeper incarnation of the ego (into the soul body) the child 'begins to discriminate between what is of soul, what is living, and what is dead' (1995: 128). In awakening to the inanimate world the child's thinking begins to develop autonomously, through the desire to understand it. In

⁴² Although Steiner is specific regarding these age cohorts, they should only be considered approximations.

⁴³ In the anthroposophical worldview this is broadly associated with ancient Indian and Egyptian consciousness.

⁴⁴ This stage in the child's consciousness is associated with ancient Greek civilization.

Steiner's view, the child's consciousness becoming more focused on the world is synonymous with the birth of the intellect.⁴⁵ However, as the soul body is yet to be liberated from the physical body, thinking and feeling are still united. The emerging intellect should not be engaged in an abstract-analytical way since it can only truly comprehend what is presented to it in pictures. For this reason it is recommended that knowledge is developed phenomenologically through description of the world, or in Steiner's terminology, "concrete images". Essentially, imagery, in an intuitive and organic sense, can stimulate the capacity for comprehension and, in so doing, 'counteract the tendency for adolescent thinking to become intellectually frozen' (Mephram 2004: 8).⁵⁰

This organic view of thinking resonates with phenomenology's concept of embodied knowing, as an alternative to the detached, Cartesian mind (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968). Acknowledging the corporeal existence of the self emerging in thought through its bodily-sense and soul relationship to the world, Waldorf education aims to ground knowledge in lived experience rather than intellectual schemata. However, although in this respect anthroposophy shares phenomenology's 'radical re-visioning of our received notions of subject-object relations' (Wylie 2007: 150), its ontological framework, as well as its epistemological goal, distinguishes it as a non-dualistic philosophy. For Steiner, the human physical body is essentially understood as being interwoven with the spiritual macrocosm, as the vessel through which the human spirit is individualized and able, through cognitive training, to penetrate reality. Whilst knowledge is therefore grounded in lived experience, this can lead to realms beyond it. This also resonates with phenomenologies that touch on the metaphysical, such as Heidegger's notion of "dwelling". This realm where the physical and spiritual merge will be explored further in relation to geographies inspired by Goethean phenomenology (2.1) and the holistic principle underpinning school geography (3.2).

(iii) *Adolescence* (14+ years: corresponding to the upper school). Considered briefly, the third stage of Steiner's model represents further significant changes in the child's inner nature, culminating in the birth of the intellect, or what Steiner described as 'laying hold of his own being within himself, through himself.. a true inner experience of freedom'

⁴⁵ This period corresponds broadly with human intellectual development from Roman civilization to the Renaissance.

(Steiner 1982: 81-2). According to Steiner, as the soul body is liberated from the physical body at puberty and begins to absorb the ego, thinking is directed outwards to the world, with feelings playing a more refined role in the cognitive process.⁴⁶ The “antipathetic” cognitive element of rational thought then begins to dominate. The adolescent intellect, however, exists in a state of tension (Steiner 1996: 73-86). Whilst being driven outwards to a clearer consciousness of the external world, the adolescent is also drawn inwards to the subjective feeling life and impulses of the emerging soul body and ego. At puberty the child is therefore challenged to adjust his or her inner life to the outer world.

As in pre-adolescence, however, in a bid to keep the intellect alive and maintain the bond with the world, Waldorf education continues to work with imaginative pictures. Where the subject area allows, a Goethean-phenomenological approach is used to generate knowledge, focusing on close observation of the world as a path to understanding its form and organization. To complement this, pupil activity leans towards artistic forms of representation.

Looking beyond Steiner’s image of the child to other developmental theories highlights the importance of the metaphysical dimension of Steiner’s child archetype and the impact this has on pedagogy. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in detail, situating Steiner’s model in relation to Piaget and Vygotsky’s views on how the child learns to think, is a useful way to highlight the unique worldview from which Steiner’s ideas are drawn, as well as to identify certain features that are potentially problematic.⁴⁷ Important differences emerge that reflect the epistemological framework and worldview of each theory. On the one hand, Piaget and Vygotsky understand mental functions as, respectively, genetically and linguistically or socio-culturally, determined (Piaget 1929, 1958; Vygotsky 1962, 1981). To some extent this subordinates the imagination. For Steiner, on the other hand, pictorial thinking has a superior, metaphysical status. Although Piaget, for example, considers the imagination as the medium through which the young child animates and unites with the world (in his “preoperational stage”), his empirical-scientific framework views mental growth primarily as a linear process, or the progressive refinement of the capacity to think rationally as a “lone scientist” (Bruner 1995).⁴⁸ Moreover, for Vygotsky, the imagination is foremost a platform for the

⁴⁶ According to anthroposophy, before its “birth” from the physical body the soul body permeates the brain organism. At puberty it then absorbs the ego (Steiner 1996, GA 302, Lecture 5).

⁴⁷ Attention is given to Steiner and Piaget’s views on spatial thinking in chapter 2.

⁴⁸ See Bruner (2006, chapter 16) for a comparison of Piaget and Vygotsky’s views on child development.

development of higher mental functions, through which actions and objects are internalized and transformed into thoughts in order to understand the world. In this respect imaginative life emerges primarily through physical interaction between the child and the world and is not present as an innate, spiritual faculty (Vygotsky 1978).

The different role and status given to the imagination therefore arises from very different epistemological and ontological frameworks. Steiner's intuitive and holistic understanding of the role imagination plays in learning is grounded in the reality of a soul-aesthetic dimension that permeates cognition and is fundamental to human development. Consequently, although Waldorf philosophy resonates with the Piagetian view that the child's thinking becomes, in an empirical sense, progressively more concrete, Steiner's metaphysical interpretation of the imagination maintains its epistemological status in adolescent learning. This is acknowledged by Ginsburg in his comparative study of the way Piaget's and Steiner's understanding of child development shapes their views on pedagogy:

As the middle grades are reached and the material presented becomes still richer and more complex, and, presumably, most children attain the stage of 'concrete operations', there is a consistent attempt to retain the artistic-imaginative approach, to combine the beautiful with the utilitarian (1982: 333).

Furthermore, Steiner's understanding of the child's ego, as yet undeveloped as the capacity for independent rational thought or reasoned judgement, is the basis of a different form of pedagogy to that proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky. Whereas Piaget's notion of individualism encourages young children to learn through their own activity, or in groups to diminish the egocentrism of their thinking, Vygotsky's language-based, social constructivist model of child development proposes a more radical interventionist role for the teacher. In comparison, Steiner's child archetype, framed on the spiritual process of incarnation, generates a different type of pedagogy and, as this thesis shows, learning discourse. As such, teaching methods in Waldorf classes more closely resemble those based on behaviourist learning theory (whole class approach, 'chalk and talk', focus on teacher narrative, etc.) than the progressive approaches inspired by Piaget's individualism or Vygotsky's social constructivism. Nevertheless, theoretical views such as Vygotsky's highlight the social function of pedagogy and, in the classroom context, the cultural positioning of worldviews underpinning taught knowledge. Viewing classroom discourse as the 'principle tool of acculturation' into a worldview (Alexander 2001: 432) is therefore, to a certain extent, a useful theoretical reference to examine the Waldorf method of knowledge-building.

In conclusion, whilst Steiner's child archetype and the pedagogy it generates are embedded in a distinctive, esoteric philosophical framework, his broad view of the intellect and learning goals also resonate with wider, non-Waldorf critiques of the modernist educational agenda. Although prioritizing the role of imagination, intuition and experience in learning is by no means unique to Waldorf, the holistic worldview underpinning this approach, arguably, is. Moreover, and highlighting the versatility of Steiner's thinking, clear connections can be made between the principles of Waldorf pedagogy and, for example, postmodern views on flexible and situated forms of knowledge-building (e.g. Elkind 1999, Hart 2007).

However, from Waldorf's philosophical position problems also emerge that require further scrutiny. Foremost, as shown in this section, the question arises regarding the integration of imaginative and intellectual learning discourses, particularly how this might be applied in classroom practice. Additionally, Steiner's holistic worldview implies a cultural positioning of knowledge (see chapter 2). As shown below, both these elements emerge as key interdependent dimensions of Waldorf's distinct learning discourse, presenting their own challenges. Before exploring this further, other key aspects of pedagogy that frame this process need to be considered.

1.4 The Waldorf Main Lesson: Pedagogy and Learning Discourse

In this section I will consider how Waldorf's imaginative pedagogy, discussed above, translates into a method for conveying and developing ideas in classroom practice. Rather than analyze pedagogy in detail, my intention here is to inform by highlighting the method used in the main lesson and, in so doing, clarify the rationale for practice investigated empirically below. To do this, two defining features of pedagogy need to be considered.⁴⁹ Firstly, the importance of narrative and dialogue in Waldorf's predominantly oral approach. Secondly, the rhythmic process, pace and duration of knowledge-building. From this pedagogical framework a distinct learning discourse is generated that supports Steiner's vision of how the child should be taught. As in the previous sections, this discussion focuses on the archetypal form of Waldorf pedagogy rather than its individual interpretation. Whilst the challenges involved in applying this model are indicated, these will be considered in more detail in the following section, and

⁴⁹ These four features of pedagogy fall into two closely-linked activities, one relating to the method of constructing knowledge, the other to its structure and time management.

also in chapters 3 and 4, when this investigation draws on classroom practice.

Although emphasis on speech is an intrinsic part of Waldorf teacher education and pupil activity (e.g. poem recitals, presentations etc.), for the purposes of this thesis I will focus on the discourse surrounding knowledge construction, as the main element of Waldorf's oral pedagogy.⁵⁰ This shapes the way the world is viewed and understanding is reached. Whilst the importance of narrative has been indicated from different perspectives by various studies of Waldorf methods (for example, Golden 1997, Nicholson 2000, Ward 2001), it needs to be understood as a part of wider, philosophically-framed discourse that connects teachers, pupils and subject matter in a particular way.⁵¹ Within this framework subject knowledges are constructed and transferred, and teacher-pupil relationships established.

Drawing on the language of Alexander's analysis of pedagogy and discourse, Waldorf main lessons exhibit a distinctive 'organisational frame', or teacher-pupil relationship, and corresponding 'interaction mode' (2001: 390-396). In this respect, main lessons characteristically involve lengthy periods of teacher-pupil exchanges to transfer knowledge (for up to 90 minutes), through the medium of what Alexander terms 'interactive whole class teaching' (2001: 391). Within this medium interaction has different forms that suit its pedagogical purpose (mainly questioning and answering, narrating and listening, and giving and receiving instructions). Before considering how these interactions are used to construct knowledge, it should be noted that Waldorf's dependence on extended periods of frontal whole class teaching has two essential functions.⁵² Firstly, in the context of the anthroposophical view of the child's emerging ego, sustained contact aims to establish what Steiner intended as a natural respect for the teacher's authority (1982: 88). Although, as Alexander suggests, such an organisational frame is associated with a 'power differential between teacher and taught' (2001: 392-3), in Steiner's view authority was not meant to be imposed in a didactic sense, but through reverence, a key element of which is the way the teacher 'communicates a feeling for beauty' through the imaginative rendering of knowledge (1996: 135). The pedagogical benefits of close contact between Waldorf class teachers and their pupils, not just in

⁵⁰ Speech, as well as singing, are integral elements of the Waldorf main lessons, intending to stimulate the child's rhythmic system and awaken its consciousness of personality by working on the ego.

⁵¹ Nicholson (2000), for example, considers the importance of narrative forms of representation. Ward (2001) examines story-telling as a medium for meaning-making.

⁵² The importance of whole class teaching in the Waldorf schema is highlighted by Woods et al (2005: 66).

single lessons but cumulatively over the course of an eight year class cycle, have been corroborated from a range of perspectives (e.g. Uhrmacher 1993b, Rivers and Soutter 1996, Armon 1997 and Woods et al 2005).⁵³

Secondly, Waldorf lessons' organisational frame suits a narrative approach. As noted, knowledge creation is largely an artistic-transformative process dependent on the teacher's ability to render it in a descriptive pictorial form and disseminate it verbally. Without the use of texts or media, knowledge construction relies primarily on teachers' narratives and dialogue with the class. Regarding the emphasis given to the oral element, Mepham highlights how direct speech between teachers and pupils offers a unique context for knowledge transfer, relying on the 'immediacy of contact' between teacher and class to infuse it with feeling (2004: 7). As a method relying on the building of imaginative-pictures, knowledge construction is foremost intended to be an artistic endeavour, as Mepham notes:

In such a setting the narrator and the listener have the capacity to understand and anticipate integrated pictures of wholeness. The pupils can share the teacher's outer and inner journey- the journey for meaning which the teacher has made and the meaning of the world which the teacher encounters (2004: 7).

As the discourse at the heart of knowledge construction, teacher narratives are also epistemologically significant. Generated by descriptive narrative, knowledge is essentially qualitative and subjective. Furthermore, through its construction and oral transmission it remains largely under the control of the class teacher. As Mepham indicates, Waldorf pedagogy prioritizes the collective 'journey' of knowledge-building through meaningful discourse, rather than the transfer of prescribed, curriculum content (2004: 7). In this respect, it is intended as an organic process unique to the classroom context in which it happens.

The importance given to narrative in knowledge-building therefore reflects Waldorf's distinct epistemological framework and pedagogical aims. However, it also raises issues regarding knowledge ownership, subjectivity and learning goals. Firstly, compared to the

⁵³ For example, Uhrmacher argues that 'focal' or routinized activities (e.g. verse, informal talk) involving close contact between teacher and pupils improves learning (1993b: 437). Rivers et al (1996) highlight how close peer relations reduce incidences of bullying. Armon (1997) shows that close contact between teachers and pupils guides teachers' moral impulse towards helping individual pupils. Furthermore, regarding teacher-pupil relations in general, Woods et al note: 'most class teachers were seen to have an excellent relationship with their pupils and a remarkable ability to bring classes to order on the strength of these' (2005: 82).

organisational context of learning discourses based on Piagetian principles, for example, the Waldorf classroom is essentially teacher-focused, supporting the close relationship and sustained interaction between teacher and pupils (Ginsburg 1982: 334). Desks in rows, facing the blackboard and rarely arranged in groups, this signifies the teacher's status as the source of knowledge and, related to this, the dominant flow of discourse. With the teacher as orchestrator (rather than the facilitator) of the knowledge-building process, the Waldorf method appears didactic. Nevertheless, as Woods et al indicate, method is, paradoxically, also finely-tuned to the child's needs:

To the extent that the teacher is crucial in bringing material directly to the children and interpreting it for them, Steiner pedagogy could be said to be teacher-centred. However, insofar as the work of the teacher must be highly attentive to child development it could also be said to possess an element of child-centredness (2005: 84).

It should also be noted that taking ownership of knowledge (its research, imaginative transformation and oral transmission) for the duration of a main lesson block is especially demanding (Woods et al 2005: 85).⁵⁴ Secondly, as noted above, in a Vygotskian sense, a narrative approach heightens the status of talk in learning as the 'principle tool of acculturation' (Alexander 2001: 432). In the Waldorf context this means, to a large extent, that subject knowledges such as geography are not only permeated by anthroposophy's holistic worldview, as shown below, but are also highly personalized. Thirdly, using narrative to construct descriptive knowledges highlights the pedagogical importance of imaginative transaction (and therefore listening) in lieu of arguably more active forms of cognitive learning, such as problem-solving (Nielsen 2003). In this respect, the shared imaginative experience of building knowledge, or as one colleague described it to me, 'journeying together', takes precedence over learning mediated by intellectual schemata, focused on what Hart terms 'egoic-rational cognition' (2007: 7). Although embedded in the aims of Waldorf education, and as an alternative to the cognitive-based learning strategies of the mainstream, this raises issues regarding the intellectual element of the Waldorf main lesson, particularly at the upper end of the lower school.

Regarding discourse structure, this relates directly to anthroposophy's holistic image of the child and the pedagogical intention to integrate and balance learning. Based on the anthroposophical child archetype, main lessons have a rhythmic organisation and pace

⁵⁴ Research on this issue is very limited. This aspect of practice is, however, highlighted in my dialogues with teachers (3.1).

that aims to cultivate thinking organically in relation to the child's whole being and developmental stage. Although lesson structure has been the theme of a number of studies (e.g. Uhrmacher 1993a, Trostli 1998, Woods et al 2005, Oberski 2006), none focus specifically on the structure of learning discourse. Rather than defined by curriculum themes (for example, discrete blocks of knowledge) or controlled by a pedagogical clock, this has a pattern and pace determined by what Woods et al describe as a 'close attentiveness to the natural rhythms of the human body and mind' (2005: 79).

Although pedagogical discourse is, inevitably, also embedded in education's social-reproductive function (Bernstein 1996), in the Waldorf main lesson a more naturalistic context therefore dominates.⁵⁵ Based on the anthroposophical view of the child and his or her educational needs, main lessons commonly follow a sequence of distinct teacher-pupil interactions or 'interaction modes' that aim to engage pupils in different learning activities (Alexander 2001: 436). Although structure varies according to the developmental stage of the child, as well as from teacher to teacher and subject to subject, it is still largely retained throughout the lower school and across the curriculum. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will consider the archetypal lesson structure for classes at the upper end of the lower school (classes 7 and 8). I use Sinclair and Coulthard's (1992) typology of classroom discourse to highlight the dominant exchanges used in knowledge-building, since these resonate with the Waldorf approach. These are: "eliciting", "informing" and "directing". In the Waldorf main lesson context these translate into the following sequence of activities:

Recall. Following various ritualized settling in and "incarnating" activities (e.g. verse, recitation, singing etc.), the main lesson theme is normally taken up by questioning focused on the previous day's content.⁵⁶ The purpose of this activity is to render in clear conscious thought-forms knowledge that was transmitted narratively and pictorially in the previous day's presentation. During this stage of the lesson, discourse is therefore usually closely controlled in order to elicit responses to content that has already been taught. The rationale for recall is based on the metaphysical view that lesson content is internalized, and therefore personalized, through the activity of the soul during sleep (Smit 1992,

⁵⁵ Although I do not underestimate the importance of such a function, it is not the focus of this research.

⁵⁶ Although normally verbal, recall may also be a writing activity.

⁵⁷ According to Steiner, during sleep the soul body and ego leave the physical body and are worked on by the spiritual world.

Steiner 1990, 1995).⁵⁷ Questioning on the following day then engages the cognitive faculty in order to interpret lesson content.

Presentation. Following recall new content is normally presented in narrative form. Interaction is therefore traditionally an extended one-way exchange in which teachers tell (often in storied form) and pupils listen. As shown in the previous sections, ‘presenting’ knowledge as a descriptive narrative aims to engage pupils in the soul-aesthetic, feeling-based activity of imagining, viewed as the embryonic stage of the thinking process. For this reason, language tends to be colourful and infused with feeling (for example, by using image-evoking word-pictures). However, in the older classes more questioning and cognitively-engaging exchanges may also be used (Woods et al 2005: 82, Oberski 2006: 354). The pedagogical discourse used for generating new content varies from teacher to teacher, as my empirical study shows.

Application. The third part of the main lesson focuses on the recording of knowledge, which normally involves descriptive writing and artistic drawing in a main lesson book. The intention of this activity is to engage the child’s will by actively transforming or consolidating knowledge into a concrete individualized form. Since this is usually a silent individual activity, it is not directly dependent on teacher-pupil exchanges. However, in the sense that it is initiated and guided by verbal commands, and involves the interpretation and reproduction of lesson content, it remains embedded in classroom discourse. In keeping with Waldorf’s model of cognitive development pupils are encouraged to interpret lesson content in a descriptive rather than analytical or critical way. The content on which they draw is, however, normally closely controlled.

Finally, the time management of the main lesson - its duration and pace - is also governed by attentiveness to the child’s natural rhythms and the way knowledge is digested. This has a direct impact on classroom discourse. Firstly, in relation to duration, the daily two hour main lesson is longer than subject lessons for similar age groups in mainstream schools. This enables knowledge to be constructed in the balanced way described above, allowing time for ritual activities, questioning, narrative and bookwork. The continuity of study of a single topic in three to four week cycles is also uniquely Waldorf. This permits the use of the sleep rhythm in knowledge acquisition, the continuity of narrative and in-depth study with minimal disruption (Woods et al 2005: 78). Through these combined

effects the intention is for pupils to immerse in an extended and cumulative discourse focused on an in-depth study of the main lesson theme, so the pupils can ‘live right into the subject’ (Steiner 1982: 69).

Secondly, as stressed by Alexander, a ‘critical issue’ in any teaching context, and one directly linked to classroom discourse, is ‘cognitive pace’ or ‘the speed at which conceptual ground is covered in classroom interaction’ (2001: 424). Although evidence of this is given in the transcripts below, it should be stressed that the cognitive pace of main lessons moves according to the rhythmic process of knowledge transformation. For this reason, the conceptual or rational element tends to emerge naturally (albeit prompted by questioning) as lesson content is digested, rather than intentionally through predefined intellectual schemata. Given that Waldorf education is rooted in its own interpretation of intellectual readiness, cognitive pace appears relatively slow. However, as shown below, this does not imply that lessons have a slow tempo.

In conclusion, Steiner’s imaginative pedagogy is implemented, as a method of learning, through a distinctive pattern of lesson discourse. Engaging pupils in the rhythmic process of listening to narrative, recall and the application of ideas is a universal feature of the Waldorf main lesson. This intends to develop thinking in relation to the totality of the child’s being which, in the lower school, focuses on the ‘affective domain’ (Oberski 2006: 345-6). To the extent that thinking is grounded in imaginative pictures, or an emotive form of cognition, the intellect, it is claimed, can develop in freedom. However, given that pedagogy carries assumptions regarding the subjectivity and ownership of knowledge, and relies on a process of repetition, this principle of freedom should, perhaps, be treated with caution. It should also be reiterated that the method outlined here is essentially an archetype that, in any given lesson context, is freely interpreted. To highlight the practical challenges of working with such a holistic approach, this is a theme I will now consider.

1.5 Working with the Archetype: Pedagogical Challenges

There are no prescribed rules for teaching in the Waldorf School, but only one unifying spirit that pervades the whole. The teacher is autonomous. Within this one unifying spirit he can do entirely what he thinks is right (Steiner 1995: 46).

In the preceding sections the rationale for Waldorf's imaginative pedagogy was considered on a theoretical level in relation to the anthroposophical child archetype. However, in his advice to teachers Steiner clearly indicates that practice should not be based on the application of a theory or a generalization of the child, but on personal insight into the nature of the human being. Although, in his original lectures, Steiner presented his vision of the child (and the related lesson structure) as the basis for pedagogy and curriculum content, the intention was for practice to develop through the class teacher's own personal deepening of knowledge and day-to-day experience of working with children. This is meant as an intrinsic part of anthroposophy's spiritual path.

According to Steiner, on the basis of such knowledge a pedagogical instinct or "artistry" of teaching is cultivated that will guide practice. In the words of one Waldorf educator, this means being able to translate the 'archetypal into lesson content and pedagogy', in such a way that 'the right word, the right body language and the right tone of voice can flow spontaneously from teacher to pupil' (Masters, in dialogue with House 2007: 45). In his discussion of Steiner's guidelines for teacher education, Kiersch emphasizes the personal-transformative or spiritual element of this pedagogical task: ⁵⁸

passive knowledge can only function with the help of instructions or prescriptions or by means of purely logical argumentation. In contrast to this he [Steiner] developed the concept of knowledge that is more than mere knowledge, a knowledge that in educational work is intended to intensify into a "knowing perception", a perception that directly activates every level of the teacher's being and only becomes fully real through the activity. The purpose of this knowledge is not to end up with some general concept to be applied in the classroom (2006: 19).⁵⁹

Given that Steiner intended his views on pedagogy to act only as a guide to classroom practice, and therefore to be freely interpreted and implemented, attention needs to be given to practicalities of the teacher's task. As a prelude to my empirical study, this chapter will therefore conclude by highlighting the key challenges that arise when working with this pedagogical framework and the problems that can arise. This is done in the same critical vein as Steiner himself advised; that the Waldorf approach should be continually surveyed and consciously developed to meet the culture of the times.

⁵⁸ House and Masters (2007), and to a certain extent Kiersch (2006), discuss issues surrounding changes in teacher education. One question raised is whether the subjective element of Waldorf pedagogy is compromised by training teachers in colleges rather than schools, as is more common today.

⁵⁹ In *Riddles of the Soul* (1996) Steiner describes a "frontier zone" where thinking is enriched by intuition.

Given Waldorf's educational goal, learning in the main lesson cannot be evaluated on a purely cognitive level. Working with the child's feeling-life and the principle of the transformation of thought (through the daily rhythm of sleep and waking consciousness), its framework is metaphysical - to educate the child in harmony with the cognitive and imaginative impulses of pre-natal and post-mortem reality, as conceived in Steiner's worldview. Furthermore, working with these impulses in a lesson context, and in the threefold way indicated above, presents the class teacher with certain challenges.

Foremost, Waldorf pedagogy relies heavily on the personal, creative ability to transform knowledge into images through descriptive narrative, an activity that requires being able to engage pupils using direct speech for lengthy, uninterrupted periods and on a daily basis. Impossible to predetermine apart from background research into knowledge content and the visualization of key images, this pedagogical process depends primarily on social interaction in the classroom, and lives in the momentary flow of speech; the medium through which the image is constructed and communicated. Moreover, it depends on the ability to integrate two types of discourse; an imaginative, descriptive narrative that transcends analytical thought and one that draws more explicitly on reflective or conceptual thinking to give ideas clearer definition. Examples of how this is done and the challenges it presents are given in my empirical study.

In practice, however, this task is complex and requires considerable skill, and effort, to perform consistently in an engaging way. The extracts of classroom talk presented below show that, in reality, the imaginative-pictorial element emerges at certain moments, fades and then reappears in the flow of narrative. In this sense knowledge is built in sequences, through moments of vivid picture-building intending to evoke a sense of place, interspersed with more mundane description and questioning, when the pictorial element is interpreted and transformed into a more clearly-defined knowledge, in so doing receding to the background. Such a learning discourse presents possible areas of both tension and ambiguity. Firstly, is the imagery powerful enough to engage pupils and achieve its pedagogical aim? Secondly, how far should pupils be drawn into a mode of more explicitly conceptual or critical engagement?

However, as an integrated learning process that aims to lead pupils from the image to understanding, the Waldorf approach is largely untheorized. Instead, it relies foremost on individual interpretation. Whilst the imaginative element of this pedagogy is its defining

feature, and is reinforced by teacher training, mentoring and pedagogical guides, the more explicit intellectual element (for example, reasoned judgement, critical reflection and conceptual schemata), remains less certain. Apart from general critiques of the epistemological framework of taught knowledge (e.g. Jelinek and Sun 2003, Golden 1997), little detailed attention has been given to how the underlying philosophy shapes learning discourse in classroom practice. Although, in the lower school, focus on imagery is crucial, the child's intellect nevertheless needs stimulus, more so on the approach to adolescence. For this reason, in the empirical section of this thesis attention focuses on how learning discourse, as a path towards understanding, engages pupils both imaginatively and cognitively in the knowledge-building process.

In conclusion, although Steiner's archetype of the child and pedagogical guidelines offer a powerful framework for classroom instruction, practice depends primarily on the teacher's own interpretative schema. However, although focus is on the individual and the class context, this does not, as the literature suggests, generate significantly different or conflicting views on practice, or at least this has not been documented. On the contrary, research generally draws on the unity, continuity and cultural versatility of the Waldorf approach, particularly its universal principles of freedom in learning and respect for the autonomy of the child (Clouder 1998). The implication is that, in practice, the Waldorf method is homogenous (Easton 1997, Oberman 1997, Woods et al 1997).

As I have highlighted in this chapter, however, Waldorf's pedagogical framework, albeit grounded in strong principles, presents significant challenges to the teacher. Translating Steiner's educational philosophy into a workable and effective learning strategy involves considerable insight into the child and skills in handling and communicating knowledge. For this reason, Waldorf philosophy, including the potentially problematic areas identified in this theoretical review, can only be understood by considering how teachers work with it in practice. Before doing so, attention will turn towards the curriculum area under investigation. Rather than a separate dimension of the Waldorf schema, it will be shown that subject knowledge (in this context geography) and pedagogy are closely related. On a philosophical level they are united by Steiner's holistic and developmental worldview. In the lesson context they are integrated by Waldorf's narrative method.

Chapter 2

Anthroposophy and Geographical Knowledges

2.0 Introduction

In chapter 1 Waldorf pedagogy was considered in relation to anthroposophy, focusing on Steiner's holistic image of the developing child. It was shown that teaching method is closely tied to the arguably naïve notion of the imagination as a primal, transcendental element of being. Although drawing on this pedagogical impulse, in this chapter attention turns towards the Waldorf curriculum to examine how geographical knowledge is shaped by the underlying philosophy. As in the previous chapter, discussion will develop around what I loosely term the anthroposophical archetype, in this context the typical holistic form of Waldorf's geographical representation. This will focus initially on its philosophical position in relation to other intellectual traditions (2.1) and then as a form of classroom-based, taught knowledge (2.2 to 2.4). Two key aspects of this knowledge are explored. Firstly, the philosophy underlying its holistic representation. This is shown to resonate with the more familiar traditions of regional geography and non-dualistic approaches, including those working with the synthetic conceptual frameworks (and worldviews) of cosmography and ecology, as well as the principles of phenomenology.¹ Secondly, how this holistic archetype problematizes knowledge with its assumptions regarding man's relationship to nature, its Eurocentric view of the world, and the marginalization of more discursive and critical forms of representation. This discussion therefore touches on wider themes concerning both anthroposophy's esoteric worldview as well as philosophical issues regarding geographical thought. Furthermore, this theoretical review of subject content will indicate areas of potential tension with the pedagogical aims considered above, in particular the notion of freedom in the learning process.

Whilst my initial focus on subject knowledge will appear to move beyond school geography, important connections will be identified. These will then be considered directly; firstly in relation to Steiner's brief indications regarding geography's place in the Waldorf curriculum and how it affects the child (2.2), and then in relation to how knowledge is transformed to suit the child's changing consciousness, as understood by anthroposophy (2.3). This developmental context is a defining feature of the Waldorf

¹ By 'non-dualistic' is meant a view of man closely connected to the external world or wider cosmos, or in an anti-Cartesian sense, both mind and matter conceived as expressions of the same universal process.

approach. As in the previous chapter it is stressed that, although theory informs practice, this does not imply a standardized form of curriculum knowledge. On the contrary, while classroom knowledges follow the holistic principle, they are also highly individualized, as shown in my empirical study.

2.1 Anthroposophy: Conceptual Framework for a Non-dualistic Geography

Although important links with school geography will be made, in this section I move beyond the curriculum to focus on the kind of geographical knowledge generated by anthroposophy's worldview. Whilst Steiner made no specific attempt to develop an anthroposophical geography, his philosophy has, however, inspired others to develop geographical understanding using his holistic framework. Although this remains largely unknown outside anthroposophical circles, as a potential contribution towards the ecological and phenomenological deepening of geographical thought this warrants attention.² Before considering examples of this work and how they resonate with other intellectual traditions in geography, it should first be noted that anthroposophy adds a metaphysical dimension to the following broad fields of knowledge:

- *Cosmography*. A knowledge of the universal connections between man and the terrestrial sphere offers a conceptual framework to develop, as in the synthetic geographies of the premodern tradition, alternative theorizations of large space (explored in this section).
- *Geographical Method*. Steiner's spiritual epistemology, what Ullrich calls a 'metaphysical Goetheanism' (2000: 31), has been used as a phenomenological method to gain insight into the essential nature of place or 'genus loci' (see below).
- *Man and Environment*. In anthroposophy, the changing relations between man and the environment are understood in the context of Steiner's evolutionary model of consciousness. This has formed the conceptual framework for holistic ecological understanding and forms of practice (e.g. biodynamic agriculture).
- *Geographical Thought*. In Steiner's cosmology human consciousness and world

² As noted by Ullrich (1994), the mystical tone of anthroposophy has largely excluded it from scientific scrutiny.

evolution are integrated and spiritually driven. Knowledge of this process offers a metaphysical framework for understanding the deeper impulses underlying epistemology and paradigmatic shifts, including geographical thought. Steiner's model of child development is also embedded in this cosmological view, enabling changes in the child's spatial consciousness, including the potential to learn geography, to be understood within a wider spiritual-developmental rather than scientific-empirical context.

It is appreciated that these are vast areas of knowledge, a full exploration of any of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in an attempt to navigate through them in a way that highlights the anthroposophical impulse in geography without digressing from the aims of this research, I will focus on a selection of key texts. These will draw on examples of anthroposophically-inspired cosmography, regional geography and phenomenological method. In the following section attention then turns towards texts on the Waldorf curriculum to consider geography in relation to the child. Connections between these different fields of geographical discourse will be indicated throughout the chapter. To date, there has been no research focusing on anthroposophical interpretations of geography, or, from a historical perspective, its position amongst other intellectual traditions. This is therefore an appropriate place to start.³

Whilst it is difficult to locate precisely the geographies considered here within the various streams of geographical thought, they generally reflect anthroposophy's close relationship to the holistic project of German idealism (1.1), with its attempt to integrate the empirical with the universal or transcendental. Although their focus moves between the sense world and the metaphysical (as shown below), and, as such, covers a vast field, they (including school geographies) are united in the general aims of their knowledge. This is to represent the harmony, beauty and synthetic qualities of space, including the physical and spiritual bonds between people, culture and place.⁴ For this reason they focus, in the classical chorographic sense, on description of the earth's regions. In a historical context this resonates with various traditions in geography, including those of contemporary relevance. These can be envisaged as two broad streams of thought flowing into geography from either side of what Livingstone terms the "Kantian Turn"-one side grounded in a premodern discourse drawing on occultism and teleology

³ For a detailed consideration of traditions in geographical thought see Livingstone (2000).

⁴ As noted above, school geography does not draw explicitly on the metaphysical element (see 2.3).

i.e. “physico-theology”, and the other on empiricism (2000: 113).⁵

Although, as Livingstone emphasizes, the metaphysical impulse remained in various guises as a latent force in geographical theorizing into the nineteenth century, in Renaissance Europe divine design or teleological thinking was the dominant worldview. Whilst the sixteenth-century “magical geographies” of John Dee, William Cunningham and Leonard Digges, for example, had an empirical-scientific (cartographic) and chorographic element, their primary concern was to integrate this knowledge with occult cosmogony, such as the zodiac and the universal notion of “macranthropos” (a concept considered further below). As Livingstone indicates, Enlightenment science then swung theology’s epistemological pendulum further towards the sense world, if only to reveal the work of the ‘rational, divine architect’ (2000: 110). Through the empirical study of nature a lineage of geographers subsequently attempted to combine close scrutiny of the physical world (its climates, peoples and cultures etc.) with Christian belief. From the divine determinism of seventeenth-century theological teleology (e.g. the Puritan cosmogonies of Robert Boyle), to the more anthropocentric teleology of the eighteenth-century (for example, Comte de Buffon), “physico-theological” geographies blended metaphysics with varying degrees of empiricism to create a knowledge of the earth’s regions and their inhabitants.⁶

Whilst anthroposophically inspired geography resurrects the premodern interest in cosmography (see below), to situate its regional and epistemological framework it is necessary to consider how the metaphysical stream later manifested in German geography and, perhaps in a more subtle way (and of more contemporary relevance), in phenomenological approaches. Between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries German geographical thought generally moved from a deductive theological position to one more focused on the reciprocity of nature and culture, albeit still within a teleological framework (Livingstone 2000: 122).⁷ Furthermore, with the shift towards empiricism, the metaphysical element became less implicit and more implied, particularly through the notion of the ecological cohesiveness and harmony of nature (man included). This holistic principle permeated the work of two prominent German geographers of the time

⁵ Livingstone uses this term to denote the epistemological shift from a predominantly metaphysical to a more empirically based knowledge, a movement inspired by Kant’s view that thinking cannot penetrate external reality but is confined to what the senses reveal.

⁶ See, for example, Yi-Fu Tuan (1968) on the geo-theological view of the hydrological cycle.

⁷ In the works of Herder, for example.

and remained an important impulse in regional geography into the twentieth century, particularly through the work of Carl Sauer. Because of the resonance between these approaches and those examined in this research (and in one case a direct philosophical connection), they deserve individual attention.

Firstly, inspired by both Kant's scientific project and Goethe's idealist belief in a metaphysical unifying principle behind the diversity of the natural world, Humboldt's *Cosmos* (1845-62) integrated a rigorous empirical method (observation, measurement and analysis) and aesthetic representation with a higher aim framed on notions of the transcendental.⁸ Although primarily agnostic rather than theological, Humboldt's geography nevertheless sought the metaphysical element in the synthetic idea of the natural region (as a part of the whole sublime earth organism), where animals and plants are united by their distinct qualities and interrelationship with the environment. In this sense Humboldt approached the essential inner forces of nature inductively or through observation of the particular. Secondly, Carl Ritter's regional geography represents a similar synthesis of empirical method and holistic principle, although in Ritter's ideology experience of nature's diversity, including its peoples, is theologically framed. In *Erdkunde* (1817-59), for example, Ritter's uses the organic analogy to present regions (of Asia and Africa) as distinct organs of the earth's cosmic individuality, or as physical expressions of the divine order. Furthermore, this biological entity largely determined the life of different races and cultures.

Whilst the notion of regions as divinely-determined organisms was subsequently developed (through the mix of evolutionary theory and colonialism) for more worldly use - into a Eurocentric narrative of ecological and climatic determinism (Livingstone 1992), racial hierarchy and political expansionist ideology (in the work of Guyot and Ratzel, for example) - other geographers developed a more benevolent form of holistic-regionalism. Resisting crude determinism, Carl Sauer's cultural geography, for example, used descriptive observation of landscape to develop a geographical imagination based on the harmony between indigenous peoples and nature, with emphasis on man as an agent of change (e.g. Sauer 1956). Although without the metaphysical framework of German idealism, Sauer's picture of the region is nevertheless a unified romantic vision with a strong ethical sense of ideal landscape, evoking what Jackson describes as the 'transcendental realm of supraindividual culture' (1989: 18). In this respect, and as Wylie

⁸ Humboldt met Goethe in 1794.

notes, Sauer's geography assumes homogenous and unified cultures and looks backward in an anti-urban, anti-modern, Arcadian and Romantic vein' (2007: 23). Elements of natural determinism and idealization of a pre-technological past also arise from anthroposophy's non-dualistic worldview and, as problematic cultural-geographical representations, are arguably exaggerated by the evolutionary principle in Steiner's thought. Before focusing on the content and potential problem of these geographies, some consideration needs to be given to anthroposophy's epistemological dimension and how, as a form of phenomenology, it compares more widely with this stream in geographical thought. Although, in a cognitive sense, this element of anthroposophy is intrinsic to its spiritual function as a path to knowledge, it is also permeates the geographies considered here.

As shown above, in opposition to Kant, and as an alternative to experimental science, Steiner adopted Goethe's epistemological view that human consciousness, in its imaginative capacity, can behold the spiritual archetype behind physical or perceivable phenomenon. Whether it is the inner nature of the developing child, the physiological principle of different animal species, or the defining quality of a biome or place (see below), according to Steiner's epistemology, true knowledge lies in the "imaginative perception" of the transformative principle rather than abstract analytical thought. Anthroposophy draws explicitly on Goethe's visually-based project, combining close observation of the world with a rigorous method of interpretation, and, as such, resonates with the tradition of phenomenology (Ullrich 1994, Kiersch 2006).

Although this approach to knowledge creation will be considered further below in relation to specific geographical texts, it should be noted that, whilst anthroposophy's phenomenological framework (inspired by Goethe's principle of imaginative perception - see below) has much in common with its existential counterpart, there are fundamental differences.¹⁰ On the one hand, it shares the same anti-Cartesian view that knowledge should be grounded in sense experience, or the context of the embodied self, and that through this relationship to the world the human is transformed (Husserl 1960, Merleau-Ponty 1962). On the other hand, it takes the goal of this knowledge, such as Husserl's transcendental notion of "essence", or Merleau-Ponty's notion of direct and primitive contact with the world (1962: 11), to a higher metaphysical level. Whilst, as Wylie notes,

¹⁰ See chapter 3 in Welburn (2004) for an account of the impact of Husserl's phenomenology on Steiner's thought.

this interface between the physical and spiritual is implicit in the ‘mythopoetic’ dimension of Heidegger’s notion of “dwelling” (2007:178), anthroposophy draws explicitly on the spiritual dimension or the realm behind sense perception - a domain that is both hidden but, in the view of Steiner, potentially knowable.¹¹ As noted above, this indicates both the breadth and ambition of the anthroposophical project. Whereas Steiner intended his followers to learn by observation and acquire knowledge inductively, in the premodern tradition he also presents his knowledge as a body of objective, spiritual facts. Both dimensions of anthroposophy, Steiner’s epistemology and his worldview, have been used as a framework to generate geographical knowledge.

Given the strength of poststructural critiques of phenomenological geographies - mostly focusing on their subjectivist assumption of “presence” and non-critical premodern representation (e.g. Deleuze 1988, Cloke and Jones 2001, Wylie 2007) - it is tempting to follow this line of thought. However, the anthroposophical perspective needs to be considered for what it essentially offers, particularly how it widens our view of how humans are related to the earth organism. In this sense it resonates with poststructural ecologies and their vision of man embedded in complex and evolving ecological systems (e.g. Murdoch 2006, Serres 1995, Conley 1997 and Guattari 2000). Whilst the notions of self are arguably polarized (one centred in the body; the poststructural position viewing man as “decentred” and a part of the wider environment), they both situate man within the greater picture. As Conley notes in reference to “being”, ‘It is a complexity.. part of a larger microcosm and macrocosm’ (1997: 64). Although the ontological framework of both philosophies therefore differs, to some extent they also converge in their ecocentric view that humans are part of a far wider ecological sphere.¹²

However, what emerges from the anthroposophical position, particularly in its view of the regional, is its grounding in empiricism and exclusion of critical discourse. As shown below, this also applies to school geography. Before focusing on the school context, the threads linking the anthroposophical viewpoint and various schools of geographical thought will be explored further. This will be done by considering how three different writers have used Steiner’s philosophy and worldview as the basis for geographical

¹¹ For example, some forms of landscape phenomenology explore the spiritual and therapeutic relationships between self, body and nature (Abrams 1996).

¹² Both viewpoints have, in an ecological sense, practical uses. For example, as the framework for biodynamic agriculture and poststructural ecopolitics (Conley 1997).

understanding. Certain themes arising here also overlap with the conceptual framework of Waldorf pedagogy considered in the preceding section. These will be considered in 2.2.

In his review of lost and marginalised geographies John Short aims to ‘excavate past representations of the world for the insights they shed on understanding contemporary issues’ (Short 2000: 3). A key theme in this excavation is the notion of the “macranthropos”, or the macrocosm-microcosm analogy, from the astrological cosmography of Ptolemy to Renaissance pictures of the human body (e.g. cordiform maps) as ‘encapsulations of the world and as keys to understanding the world’ (2003: 56).¹³ According to Short, such unified mythic imaginations remain an antidote to the decentred and disembodied geographies of modernism and should be resurrected as a ‘fusion of old and new knowledges’ or ‘new cosmographies’ that acknowledge our physical and psychological connection to the wider cosmos (2003: 102). Whilst offering only an indication of how the premodern worldview can contribute to contemporary geography (through the rather vague notion of a cosmically-framed, but “embodied” and earth-centred environmentalism that explores the dialogue between self, soul and place), Short nevertheless raises an important issue regarding the updating of non-dualistic approaches. In his call for a ‘precise model of the microcosm-macrocosm’, or a “connected system” (2003: 105), he recognizes the need for a more rational understanding of the metaphysical framework that connects humans with terrestrial space. As he notes, this resonates with modern holistic ecologies that aim to integrate empirical science and myth to establish universal laws (as developed in the ecological worldview of James Lovelock, for example).¹⁴

Although Short pays more attention to ancient non-Western beliefs and practices (e.g. feng shui and geomancy) than the notion of a “precise model”, in *Gaia-Sophia* (1989), an example of an anthroposophically-inspired geography that deserves attention, Kees Zoeteman works with Steiner’s unified worldview to develop a rational and objective understanding of how the human and earth organisms, including terrestrial processes, are related. In his “framework for ecology” Zoeteman presents a view of the earth based on the universal principle of the threefold organism, which is also used as the

¹³ See chapter 2: ‘*A Heart-Shaped World?*’ in Short (2000). See also Cosgrove (2001) for forms of the cosmographic imagination generated during the Renaissance.

¹⁴ Lovelock: *Gaia - A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979).

anthroposophical archetype for the human soul and image of the child (as shown in 1.3).¹⁵ Zoeteman's views the earth as a macro-organism with a distinct vertical and horizontal structure. Regarding the vertical sphere, at the "head" of the planet is the outward-looking, terrestrial sphere of the crust, transmitting impressions from the cosmos to the centre. Above this, the "metabolic-limb system", corresponding to the higher atmosphere, ingests and transforms nutrients from the sun. Between these two spheres are the air and water systems of the lower atmosphere and hydrosphere and biosphere, representing the "rhythmic-circulatory system". According to Zoeteman, as the "organs" of the earth each sphere performs a vital function for the whole; "steering" or controlling (by the head, the most immobile part of the body), "implementing" or carrying out commands (by the metabolic-limb system), and "connecting" or harmonising the other two poles (by the rhythmic-circulatory system). Each organ is then further sub-divided according to the different functions embedded in them and their manifestation as terrestrial processes. For example, the "steering" function of the "chest organism" is described as the 'geographical relief of the land, which influences the pattern of rainfall and the speed at which water flows' (Zoeteman 1989: 185). In this respect the whole earth is viewed as a mirror of the human being, with each organ capable of being broken down into further parts and functions. Compared to the human being, however, the earth's organs are externalised and diffused.

Zoeteman subsequently constructs a macro-scale terrestrial geography based on the same organic principle.¹⁶ For example, the earth's rhythmic-circulatory system is associated with ocean currents and air movement. The metabolic system is centred in the areas of greatest plant growth. And the head, being most open to the cosmos (as the human head-based senses are to the external environment), corresponds with the polar regions and deserts. Furthermore, as with the child, different parts of the macro-organism are thought to serve a different time function and soul process. The head or mineral sphere is related to the earth's past or climatic memory (thinking), the metabolic system to building and sustaining the physical body for the future (willing), and the rhythmic-circulatory system

¹⁵ As shown above, in this model the human "soul" has three main faculties, each centred in a different part of the physical body. "Thinking" is seated in the head (the nerve-sense focus of the brain), through which man relates to the past; "feelings" are centred in the chest (respiratory-circulatory system of air and blood) and connect man to the present; and "willing" is seated in the metabolic-limb system, drawing man to the future. In anthroposophy this threefold conceptualization of the organism is used with some versatility. For example, as the basis for understanding the threefold division of human organs and the structure of society (in its legal, cultural and economic forms). Further illustration of its geographical application is given below.

¹⁶ Chapter 9 in Zoeteman: *The Earth as a mirror of man*.

with the continual flow of atmospheric changes, or the present. To complete the analogy, terrestrial processes are associated with tendencies towards death (head forces), life (metabolic processes) and the rhythmic movement between the two.

Although this view of space may appear more imagined than real, at the continental scale, and in an empirical sense, it becomes more concrete and gains validity. For example, Africa and the Americas are characterised by Zoeteman with strong tendencies towards the life and death poles (both having rainforests and deserts). In Africa, however, with its huge mineral element (the Sahara), the death pole dominates. In America, the landmass is dominated by the life-pole (the Amazon basin). In Europe, on the other hand, where the (rhythmic-circulatory) system of rivers and air movements prevail, there is generally a weaker polarity and hence a more temperate environment. As a conceptual framework for a regional geography this organic threefold principle will be examined more critically below. To begin with, however, Zoeteman's schema needs to be situated within its own intellectual tradition, and, more widely, amongst other schools of geographical thought.

Firstly, in his application of an anthroposophical concept, Zoeteman adopts an essentially deductive approach to construct his geographical picture. In this respect his epistemological framework is more theoretical than the approaches considered below. Secondly, his cosmography is earth-focused, drawing on the discourse of rational science in its attempt to integrate metaphysics with empirical method. In this sense, and in the way Short recommends, it represents an updated version of a premodern, non-dualistic geography (2000). Thirdly, and related to this point, Zoeteman's synthetic-transcendentalist view resonates with holistic ecologies, most notably Lovelock's Gaia Theory, in the way it draws on the interdependence and harmony of the natural spheres to portray the whole earth as an organism with sublime intelligence. However, in keeping with anthroposophy's unified macranthropic view, Zoeteman represents the earth as the mirror of man.¹⁷ Fourthly, although with its biological analogy this view of the earth is closely related to late nineteenth-century discourse of natural, as opposed to theological, determinism, or what Livingstone calls the 'geographical experiment' (1992: 190), its cosmographic and metaphysical dimension retains the impulse of earlier teleological

¹⁷ Also, whereas the Gaia Hypothesis does not personalize the earth's intelligence, Zoeteman associates it with the earth's 'ego' or, according to Steiner, the 'Christ Being'. However, each model stresses the importance of maintaining balance in the earth organism.

thought. The strength and versatility, and arguably also the problem, of the metaphysical macro-organic principle, is highlighted by the work of another geographer who attempts to integrate both the natural and human spheres in his holistic, anthroposophically-inspired worldview - Andreas Suchantke.

In his *Eco-geography* (2001) Andreas Suchantke adopts Goethe's epistemology of imaginative perception to understand the threefold organism, as it manifests in different human and animal life forms and in the wider physical environment. As indicated in his introduction, this phenomenological approach makes the assumption that the human imagination, conceived as a synthetic "ecological" activity, can read the language of nature by synthesizing the diverse forms in which it presents itself to human vision. Through this activity man beholds the transcendental, unifying principles of the earth organism. In Goethe's view these can be inwardly pictured as the metamorphosis of form and the organism's inherent polarity.¹⁸ In this sense a phenomenological interpretation of the world reveals essential universal meanings or "archetypes" in a pictorial form.

Suchantke uses these principles to construct, and artistically represent, a holistic geography from direct observation and description of the landscape. For example, his idea of 'three landscapes as a single organism' (the title for his chapter 2) is an attempt to synthesize the multitude of life forms of each African biome into individual wholes, in order to understand the key relationships that define the continental organism. In the self-contained rainforest, or the 'life-pole', for instance, where trees create the landscape and form habitats, life-forms are subsumed by the dominant "metabolic" process and, in Suchantke's view "morphologically converge".¹⁹ Furthermore, the physiological and psychological development of mammals and humans remains suppressed. Indigenous peoples, for example, are characterised by their stunted growth and child-like qualities (a view explored further below). On the other hand, in the desert regions where the earth is open to the atmosphere there is a tendency towards mineralization and death. Life-forms are more scarce and protected (reflected in the contracted forms and gestures of plants). Here, indigenous people are portrayed with a more developed and assertive sense of self. Essentially, life only exists by taking a hold of the harsh environment.

¹⁸ For example, plants are drawn towards both the earth and cosmos. This is represented in their archetypal form.

¹⁹ For example, wing patterns of different butterfly species show similar forms; insect life serves the tree system.

To complete this picture, the savanna is portrayed as a region held between the tension of the two extremes and therefore in constant rhythmic alternation. Here, the landscape is formed primarily by the close relationship between the seasonal rains and the movement of large mammals migrating across the plains. A region of dynamic contrasts (between light and shade, wet and dry, vegetation and mineral, life and death etc.), the savanna, as a unity, is held in a tension between the other two realms. In this open terrain a diversity of animal life gives full expression, behaviourally and physiologically, to its inner soul nature, in so doing permeating the landscape with colour and feeling. The lion, for example, as the archetypal incarnation of the wider organism's dominant rhythmic-circulatory system, holds the polarities in perfect balance.²⁰ The zebra's coat is portrayed as a living representation of the wider environmental contrasts between light and shade.

As noted, to some extent the holistic principle of interdependence between the different natural spheres, considered by Suchantke in a spatial sense, resonates with Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. Moreover, similar to Lovelock, Suchantke also considers how human activity disrupts the natural balance. The increasing aridity of the savanna, for example, is related to the destruction of the rainforest (portrayed as the interior oceans of the African shield). From a more esoteric perspective, the "death forces" of the head or mineral sphere are understood as spreading into the whole organism, as the balance between the other two organs begins to break down (a view resembling anthroposophy's holistic understanding of the child and the need to balance its different cognitive, affective and volitional spheres).²¹ With a view to restoring balance, Suchantke suggests that more harmonious culture-environment relations, reflected in the traditional symbiosis of spiritual belief and land management, can only be revitalized by re-envisioning nature.²² In this respect, understood as an organ of inner perception, the human imagination plays the vital role.

Before evaluating this view I will briefly consider one further work that also adopts a Goethean-phenomenological approach to understand the landscape, albeit on a smaller

²⁰ See chapter 3 in Shad (1971): *The Threefoldness in Mammals*. Shad uses Steiner's threefold concept to understand the principles underlying the physiology of different animal species and the metamorphosis of their forms. For example, the lion is portrayed with a dominant respiratory-circulatory system, reflected in its dentition, breathing rhythm and the sleeping-waking polarity of its behaviour. In comparison the giraffe is dominated by its metabolic-limb system, which manifests in its distinctive body form and habits.

²¹ This relates to the principle of balance in Waldorf education or not allowing the intellectual forces to dominate and permeate the child's whole organism.

²² Suchantke uses the example of traditional forest management in Sri Lanka, based on the Buddhist concept of the one-ness of nature.

spatial scale and with more focus on artistic representation. In *Awakening to Landscape* (1992), Jochen Bockemuhl makes the same ontological and epistemological assumptions that different aspects of the landscape are united by the transcendental organising principle that only the human imagination can behold. Based on this artistic-phenomenological framework, Bockemuhl then develops an understanding of place based on three key principles. Firstly, that the embodied experience of perceiving nature, rather than abstract conceptualization, is the basis for knowing it. Secondly, that the resulting image or idea is never actually complete, but always evolving as further perceptions are assimilated into the whole. As a representation this therefore develops more as an impression rather than a fixed concept, as Bockemuhl notes:

All these images, which we can never see at the same time.. come together in a single whole in our minds. We are active when we walk around and make connections between the things we perceive, so that the inner 'image' grows richer and fuller. It is not an image in the usual sense, however, for there are no simple terms to define it. Something comes up that is like a memory and yet something entirely new: the idea or 'genius' of place (1992: 62).

Thirdly, and what distinguishes it as an anthroposophically-framed phenomenology, is the way the human and earth organisms are related. Relying on the principle of the threefold organism, Bockemuhl develops an imagination of the earth as the exteriorized, unembodied reflection of man. This ontological framework determines how the landscape must be read, as Bockemuhl indicates:

To perceive the landscape as an organic whole, we must note the specific indications given by individual life forms and their peculiar qualities. The functional relationships, mode of development, specific way of giving expression to life and potential for future development are not embodied, that is, they do not relate to a point representing a life form, but may be experienced by the [human] senses as the soul and spirit of the surrounding sphere. Our approach has to be reversed, therefore, if we want to perceive a landscape or the whole earth as an organism. In a human organism, the individual presents himself directly to the observer through the different forms of expression. Organs and internal functions remain hidden from direct view. In a landscape it is the other way round, as the organs and their functions are immediately perceptible, whereas the expression, language and unity of the whole are only found by bringing them together in inner vision (1992: 268).

What is hidden from direct perception of the landscape is therefore revealed in the human, in various external expressions of the inner nature or soul - as speech, gesture, facial expression and physiognomy. According to Bockemuhl, however, through the soul-aesthetic realm of the imagination it is possible to inwardly perceive these different features of the external world. For example, relief indicates what he calls the 'gesture' of

the landscape, pointing towards its 'potential for development' or will force (1992: 230). Moreover, plant life and colour represent the earth's facial expression and mood. Bockemuhl captures scenes of the 'genius loci' with his own artistic representation.

These geographies raise important issues regarding knowledge and representation. As with phenomenological approaches in general, to a large extent their meaning lies more in their intuitive interpretation and artistic representation of the world than their analytical content. For this reason it is important to judge these works on the basis of their epistemological and ontological position. As noted above, this lies within the field of what Short calls 'earth-based cosmographies' that recognize 'our embeddedness in a wider cosmos', albeit without withdrawing totally from a rational form of discourse (Short 2000: 104). From an anthroposophical perspective, this means adopting a phenomenological method to 'enter into the living wholeness of the earth', as a way to understand the organic functioning of places and regions (Bockemuhl: 268). As a holistic conception of the organism based on Steiner's non-dualistic worldview, this approach resonates with anthroposophy's understanding of the child, as considered in the preceding chapter.

This notion of a unifying principle that can only be grasped on an imaginative or intuitive level, makes an important epistemological assumption. As indicated above (for example, in Suchantke's understanding of the imagination as an "organism"), from this viewpoint the self is conceived as an embodied and centred entity with the capacity to directly behold the essential nature of space. Although, as a principle of phenomenology, the assumption of a neutral and universal (and implicitly masculine) presence has been widely criticised, most notably from the poststructural perspective (e.g. Wylie 2007), this notion of the I, as, essentially, a bridge between the physical and spiritual, is intrinsic to the anthroposophical project. Suchantke, for example, claims that nature's true meaning can only be found through its direct observation and re-creation in imagination. Verbal-analytical forms of knowledge, relying foremost on conceptual schemas, cannot penetrate the world in such depth.

Closely related to the imaginative impulse and organic-holistic principle is the form of spatial representation. In this area two fundamental tensions emerge that, to an extent, problematize the geographies considered above. Firstly, as geographies embedded in the

ontological assumption of a cosmic order permeating the physical world, cultural representations are naturalized and deterministic - a problem generally associated with nineteenth-century geographical discourse (Livingstone 2007). On the one hand, in a pre-modern Arcadian sense, focus on nature generates paradisaical images of people living in harmony with the environment.²³ Naturalistic portraits of pygmies or Bedouins, for example, resemble exoticized and, arguably, primitive colonial depictions of non-Europeans and hostile environments (forms of representation challenged by Said 1994 and Driver 2001, for example). On the other hand, the notion of a unifying principle integrating all life forms in the region, including man, carries overtones of evolutionary naturalism and determinism. A common feature of the geographies of Ratzel, Weber and Shaler, for example, were their adoption of the Darwinian principle of adaptation of the whole organism, including cultural forms, to the natural world. As described by Livingstone, this organic analogy became ideologically driven and expressed in forms of 'moral climatology' (2007: 221-241), such as Taylor's (1924) and Miller's (1931) Eurocentric view that the tropical environment retarded the development of black Africans. The holistic and evolutionary dimension of anthroposophy's worldview is, in this sense, potentially problematic as a framework for geography.²⁴ Secondly, interwoven with the organic analogy is the form of spatial definition. The common feature of all the geographies considered above is the natural criteria they use to define the region - primarily the biome or landscape. Moreover, the human psyche is portrayed as embedded in such spaces.²⁵ With such a contextualization, issues regarding nationhood, cultural displacement, power and conflict remain marginal.

However, although cultural aspects of the geographical imagination remain ideologically

²³ For example, Klett's (1992) depiction of how medieval Christian ideals were realized in the farming practices and cultivated landscapes of Western Europe. See *The Cultivated landscapes of Europe* (chapter 11 in Bockemuhl 1992).

²⁴ According to anthroposophy, the human individuality, a spiritual entity, incarnates into a certain region and evolves in a cultural context or "folk soul" or national psyche, with its unique traits of language, temperament etc. The physical region also provides certain opportunities for spiritual development. For example, ancient Egyptian consciousness was suited to the environmental conditions of the upper Nile. Later, European civilisation, with more highly developed ego forces and potential for reflective thought, developed in a temperate region - a context which propelled the human transformation of nature. Although, for Steiner, the earthly regional context was contingent to the human spirit or individuality, his evolutionary views have, nonetheless, been criticised for upholding racial hierarchy. The notion of symbiosis between region and human consciousness is an important element of the evolutionary principle guiding the school curriculum, including its geographical content (see 2.2).

²⁵ For example, in his portrait of South America, Suchantke relates the destruction of the Amazon rainforest to the foreign (or European) psyche and the perception of nature as a resource to be exploited.

²⁶ Cosgrove, for example, explores images of the homology of the world and the human body (2001, 2005).

contentious, this does not necessarily undermine the primary holistic principle. As Short emphasizes, since we are essentially ‘children of the earth’, man-environment relations, including the more widely envisioned macrocosmic framework, will remain an important theme in geographical discourse (2000: 105). Furthermore, as indicated by Cosgrove’s account of the authority and endurance of the global image (manifest, for example, in such diverse forms as Renaissance map art and Apollo space photographs), although the ‘positionality of any philosophical universalism’ is inevitable and provokes different viewpoints, the human imagination is essentially drawn towards the unifying ‘cosmographic dream’ (2005: 25). The metaphysical search for totality, unity and order - the non-dualistic principles of cosmography - will, one can assume, endure as an existential and cosmopolitan impulse in geographical thought.²⁶ In this sense non-rational and mythical discourse will arguably persist as a challenge to geography’s purely scientific reason (Olsson 2007). As a philosophy centering the human individuality within the world and the wider cosmos, anthroposophy essentially upholds this tradition.

2.2 Steiner’s General Indications for Geography and its Impact on Child Development

The remainder of this chapter will focus on how the holistic principle explored above is used as a conceptual framework for geographies taught in the Waldorf school. This will be done in two parts. Firstly, by focusing on Steiner’s holistic understanding of ‘geo’ and the status he gave geography in the curriculum, I will consider how geography is integrated with other subjects and used to support child development. Secondly, by drawing on the anthroposophical image of the child, the developmental context of geography will be explored in more detail. This will identify possible tensions in the conceptual framework guiding classroom practice (2.3 and 2.4). This discussion will therefore address the distinctive feature of the Waldorf approach - its attempt to integrate subject knowledges and pedagogy with anthroposophy’s holistic, evolutionary worldview, and in so doing identify the potential problems this may create.

As would be expected from Steiner’s worldview, integral to his curriculum indications for geography is the idea of the earth as a living organism integrated with the cosmos. Although, in the spirit of the educational philosophy, teachers are free to develop subject knowledge, as a general principle Steiner repeatedly emphasizes that space should be

represented holistically, as a totality where nature and culture are intertwined, in both the whole earth and regional contexts. Whilst this synthetic picture develops in close relation to the changing consciousness of the child (see below), throughout the middle school (classes 4 to 8) Steiner intended geography to retain the status of what he called the “mother’ subject”, one that ‘brings a unity to all the other subjects’ (GA 294/1988: 162). For this reason, and similar to other subjects, it is developed in close relation to the wider curriculum and year theme. Moreover, as Stockmeyer indicates, it is consolidated ‘in constant transformation and intensification’ as the class years progress (1991: 80). According to Steiner, this avoids what he describes as the ‘worst thing that can happen to geography.. to be regimented into a strictly demarcated timetable’ (GA 294/1988: 162).

Although the status of geography as a unifying subject will become clearer in my empirical study, this needs some theoretical clarification. In relation to class 5, for example, Steiner indicates that geography had to be integrated with botany:

Geography must be taught together with a description of the country and observation of the plants, for the earth is an organism and the plants are like the hair of this organism (1995: 56).

By class 6, however, the geographical picture should be developed through connections with mineralogy and relief. In this sense it is intended to build up a portrait of the physical relationships that constitute the natural region (as a resource base for human industry) and also remain sensitive to the child’s evolving consciousness of the world (see below). In classes 7 and 8, however, the geographical imagination then becomes more culturally, and usually historically, contextualized. Geography then undergoes a transformation from description of the ‘physical and external aspects.. to understanding the spiritual conditions of the different peoples and how they have developed their characters’ (GA 294/1988: 162). In this way it assimilates the themes of other main lessons.²⁷

This close connection between geography and history is a distinctive feature of the Waldorf curriculum. As history feeds into geography, so geography permeates, on a more subtle level, the historical context of each year theme. For example, based on the (anthroposophical) developmental notion of “recapitulation”, the class 6 and 7 curricula are shaped according to key stages in the evolution of Western consciousness (broadly

²⁷ For example, developing links with the botany main lesson in class 5, geology in class 6 and history in class 7 and 8.

speaking, from ancient Rome to the Enlightenment).²⁸ The connections between geography and history are made clear by Steiner in his advice to teachers:

..show how the development of history itself depends on what comes from the earth, from its climate and from all that it brings forth in its various regions (GA 294/1988: 143).

In practice geography main lessons towards the upper end of the lower school are often interwoven with historical narratives. This is a feature explored further below.

This holistic notion of ‘geo’, whereby different curriculum subjects are drawn together, complements geography’s pedagogic and developmental aim. In this respect Steiner makes clear connections between learning geography and child development or, in anthroposophical understanding, the child’s incarnation into the physical body and earthly space, including the social and cultural realm. Foremost, geography is assigned an essential cosmopolitan and moral role:

A child with whom we study geography in an intelligent way will have a more loving relationship to his fellow men than one who has no feeling of what proximity in space means; for he will learn to feel that he lives alongside other human beings and he will come to have regard and respect for them. Such things play no little part in the moral training of the children (GA 302/1996: 56).²⁹

Furthermore, in accordance with the anthroposophical view that thinking affects the child’s spiritual and physical development, geographical study is considered more than an intellectual process of acquiring knowledge about the earth. Rather, it is thought to penetrate deep into the child’s being, affecting his or her relationship to the world and sense of belonging. Such indications regarding the impact of subject knowledges on the whole child are uniquely Waldorf. The rationale for this needs to be considered further.

In Steiner’s view, and closely related to the phenomenological position considered above, the corporeal nature of man is fundamental to the cognitive process. The child therefore thinks with its whole body:

When we see the human as a being who draws conclusions, who is placed within the world and does not separate from it through the head, we cannot think of him or her without the surrounding space. Space is part of the human being. Insofar as we have feet and legs, we are part of the world of space. Being positioned in space with feet on ground is the realm of our conclusions.’ (GA 302/1996: 55).³⁰

²⁸ For example, in class 6 history focuses on the Romans, with closer attention paid towards the physical world (for example, geology) and causality. In Class 7, attention then focuses on Renaissance history and art.

²⁹ In this lecture Steiner suggests that a lack of attention to geography is ‘partly responsible for the terrible decline in recent years of the brotherly love that should prevail among men’ (GA 302/1996: 56).

³⁰ Steiner relates the drawing of conclusions to the feet and the soul faculty of willing.

In this sense, thinking's seat in the human organism compensates for the head's natural tendency, in a spiritual sense, to 'tear us away from the world' (GA 302/1996: 35), thus bringing consciousness towards the physical realm or, in esoteric terms, 'setting the astral body firmly, so to speak, on its legs.. bringing about a certain firmness in the human being' (GA 302/1996: 33).³¹ By directing the child's thinking towards the earth, geography therefore facilitates the incarnating process. And, as Stockmeyer notes, this connection between geographical study and its spiritual purpose should be 'ever present in the mind of the teacher' (1991: 82).³²

However, Steiner also indicates that such a consolidation in the child depends on the nature of geographical thought. As discussed above (1.3), although pedagogy focuses on the imaginative pictorial transformation of knowledge, Steiner emphasizes that this should 'always stress the reality of space' or 'a true seeing in space' (GA 302/1996: 55). By this he meant that geographical knowledge should be both pictorial and concrete, or generated from images constructed from detailed description of the world and based primarily on the "life of man". This notion of an empirically-based "concrete picture" is one Steiner repeatedly uses in connection with the subject.

In a further indication Steiner distinguishes between the different spiritual effects of the imaginative-pictorial and geometrical dimensions of geographical knowledge. Whereas the "picture element" of geography is related to that which 'protects the ego from being drawn too deeply into the [physical] organism', it can also 'easily lift the ego out of the body.' To compensate, Steiner advises teachers to 'introduce anything into our teaching of geography which requires a more geometrical kind of thinking, [which] bring[s] the child's ego back into his organism' (GA302/1996: 55).

This is a general reference to the imaginative and cognitive dimensions of geographical thought and the different effects they have on the incarnating child. On the one hand, as noted above, knowledge that draws more on the subjective "soul-aesthetic realm" of the imagination is considered to draw the spirit outwards. On the other hand, more intellectually framed knowledge (the clearly-defined graphical dimension such as map work, or conceptualizing, analysing, and establishing causality etc.) is thought to

³¹ In a therapeutic sense Steiner indicated the benefits of geographical instruction for children with a 'dominant head organization' to bring the child 'more into the earth' (GA 302/1996: 39).

³² Stockmeyer (1991) draws on Steiner's pedagogical indications in his curriculum guide for Waldorf schools.

draw the spirit inwards. Although, for reasons explained above, the Waldorf approach relies heavily on the image element of knowledge, this indicates Steiner's intention that learning discourse should strike a level of balance and integrate both key modes of thought.³³

Furthermore, in support of a balanced and holistic learning method, and to encourage mobility in thinking, Steiner introduced an important concept in his advice on how to teach geography. His notion of "concrete mental pictures" refers to images that are both plastic in the sense that they can accommodate further details or description of the world, and graphic in the sense of accuracy and clear definition. This resonates with both Hart's holistic view that learning should engage both intuitive and rational modes of thought, as well as Steiner's epistemological principle of the organically developing concept (as considered in 1.2). These different types of learning discourse and the way they are integrated as a strategy to construct knowledge in the lesson context will be explored in detail in the following chapters. Firstly, however, the philosophy guiding the Waldorf approach to geography, particularly the way knowledge is integrated with child development, needs to be considered in further detail.

2.3 Geography for the Developing Child

The distinctive feature of the Waldorf approach is the way geography is integrated with anthroposophy's holistic worldview and understanding of child development, with its focus on the organic process of how the child learns to think. In this section this conceptual framework will be explored in more detail by focusing on two interrelated themes. Firstly, how geographical representation changes in its spatial scale and framework of human-environmental relations as the child develops. Secondly, how the pedagogical process involved in building this geographical picture aims to engage the child in a way of thinking appropriate to his or her age. In this section my theoretical analysis therefore focuses on how, in a developmental context, the (anthroposophical) archetypes of the child and the world are integrated. Although, as noted, this discussion does not imply the application of a definitive learning method or prescribed curriculum knowledge, there are nevertheless certain universal features that are distinctive of

³³ This is a view supported by Brierley in his interpretation of the Waldorf geography curriculum, where he stresses the importance of 'periodic shifts between geographical description and geometrical measurement'.. 'to flex and vitalize the soul forces of the student' (2003: 41).

Waldorf.

Foremost, as the child develops knowledge generally becomes more concrete (in the graphic way images are drawn from detailed description of the world) and geographical representation more culturally and historically contextualized. This schema for knowledge-building will firstly be viewed as a developmental model embedded in the principles of Waldorf philosophy and then, in the following section, within a broader theoretical field. In the following chapters attention will then focus on how this conceptual framework is interpreted, from the position of the teacher, in classroom practice.

Drawing on Steiner's image of the developing child and limited curriculum guidelines, as well as more recent pedagogical texts, it is possible to trace how the developmental principle shapes geography in the lower school.³⁴ Broadly, the Waldorf approach, based on anthroposophical understanding of the "incarnating" child (as considered in 1.3), aims to 'accompany and support the children in their physical, psychological and spiritual development' (Rawson and Richter 2000: 147). Framed on anthroposophy's non-dualistic worldview, geography therefore aims to integrate representation of the external world, in both its physical and human dimensions, with the child's organically changing consciousness. Hence, the way the world is viewed and understanding is reached undergoes a transformation in relation to the child's changing consciousness or, according to Rawson and Richter, how the child 'sees the world and experiences itself in it' (2000: 147). Four key stages in this developmental model can be identified:³⁵

(i) *From Consciousness of Unity to Concrete Reality* (classes 1 to 3). According to anthroposophy, until about the eighth year the child retains a dreamy awareness of the earth as a living totality.³⁶ From classes 1 to 3 (age 6 to 8) geography is therefore not taught formally as a distinct subject, but is approached indirectly through descriptive stories that animate nature and depict the unity of the different natural realms. During this stage the main pedagogical aim is to nurture the imaginative faculty and sense of wonder, rather than to engage the child on a conceptual or rational level. By class 3, however, as

³⁴ Curriculum guidelines are drawn from Stockmeyer (1991) and Rawson and Richter (2000).

³⁵ For the purpose of this thesis more attention will be given to the middle school. Quotes in this section are from the curriculum guidelines for geography, as indicated by Rawson et al. (2000: 147-154). Definitions and analyses of these stages are my own.

³⁶ According to Steiner, the younger child still has a strong connection with "prenatal" or spiritual reality.

awareness is thought to shift from 'the world that was a part of them [to] the world that surrounds them', and with thinking more grounded in sensory information, consciousness of the physical earth is intentionally cultivated (Rawson and Richter 2000: 149).

According to the curriculum guidelines, this marks the beginning of geography's first task: 'to bring the child down to earth [and] awaken them to the world around them' (2000: 148). As the child incarnates and thinking focuses more on the physical world, geography closely follows the transition towards a more clearly defined spatial consciousness. In class 3 a concrete picture of nature is therefore presented, focusing on land-based human activities such as farming or mining. However, at this stage the conceptual geographical element is still withheld, with learning based primarily on practical activity.

(ii) *Crossing the Rubicon and Finding a Home in the World* (class 4 to 6). As shown above, anthroposophy relates the emergence of the child's reflective cognitive faculty to the incarnation of the spiritual body (the ego or I) into the etheric organism. From the ensuing awareness of a separation from the world, a natural curiosity arises concerning the external environment, together with an emerging ability to think conceptually. At the 9 year mark (class 4) geography therefore begins as a formal, academic subject to differentiate and represent space on a conceptual level. However, the cognitive element aims to be child-centred in three fundamental ways. Firstly, being drawn from the personal experience of the locality it is grounded in the child's perceptual field or memory pictures, rather than intellectual schemata. In a typical main lesson, for example, map symbols are drawn in a pictorial way to represent topography, or compass directions are based on observations of the sun.³⁷ Secondly, focusing on the neighbourhood aims to orientate the child within its home environment, in so doing reinforcing the child's natural egocentric view of the world as well as sense of belonging. Thirdly, focusing on the description of how human activities have developed in relation to the natural environment, the geographical imagination constructed is essentially deterministic. In this sense, and based on anthroposophical understanding, representation reflects the child's instinctive view of the world as an integrated whole. In its pictorial element knowledge is also closely attuned to the child's aesthetic-imaginative interpretation of the world, allowing for the errors and illusions of subjectivity, rather than fixed conceptual

³⁷ The class 4 geography main lesson typically begins with a walk around the neighbourhood of the school.

definitions (Brierley 2003: chapter 8).³⁸

In class 5, geography moves beyond the experiential domain to terra incognita, or the ‘envisaging of unfamiliar scenes’, with an initial focus on the home nation (Brierley 2003). Based on the concept of the nation as an organic unity of man and nature, geographical representation reflects crude forms of nineteenth-century determinism. In particular, the notion that human growth and development, including national character, is dependent on the natural region (resembling, for example, Ratzel’s “antropo-geographie”). In the British context, for instance, geography tends to focus on “island” culture and how regional identities (dialects, temperaments etc.) are shaped by the physical environment (Brierley 1998: chapter 10). Curriculum indications reinforce this contextualization: ‘They must learn to understand the earth as a natural space with specific life rhythms in which human beings are enveloped’ (Rawson and Richter: 150). As noted above, the idea of the region as a self-contained entity that shapes culture is considered a powerful one for this age group. Based on the view that the child’s thinking is still embedded in its life of imagination the geographical picture relies heavily on characterization and naturalistic portraits built up through vivid description.

In Class 6, the geography curriculum is extended spatially to encompass the home continent, as well as an overview of the whole earth. Although continuing to focus on the natural region, the geographical picture undergoes further transformations, as the child’s consciousness awakens both to the external inanimate world and permeates more deeply into its inner life (or, in anthroposophical understanding, as the ego incarnates into the soul body).³⁹ At this age attention is therefore intentionally drawn closer towards the physical earth (relief, rivers, climate, resources etc.) as the fabric of regional differentiation and cultural determination, and, to accommodate the polarities of the inner soul experience, focuses on contrasting landscapes and peoples (for example, highland and lowland, north and south). Although representation remains primarily pictorial, learning discourse, to a certain extent, has to now meet the emerging intellect. However, rather than applying abstract conceptual frameworks, the aim is to engage pupils on a

³⁸ The importance of the subjective and imaginative element of Waldorf geography is considered in Brierley’s two curriculum texts: *In the Sea of Life Enisled* (1998) and *No Man is an Island* (2003).

³⁹ As shown above, Steiner makes a clear connection between the child’s awakening to the inanimate world and the emergence, at around the twelfth year, of the powers of rational thought and comprehension. However, he also emphasizes that this capacity is still interwoven with ‘fading instinctive impulses and relationship to the world’, or what he calls the ‘twilight instincts of the soul.’ For this reason, ‘comprehension is something that blossoms not only in man’s intellect but also includes feelings and will’ (GA 302/1996: 40).

cognitive level in an organic way, by allowing intuitive responses to the imaginative content. As indicated in my empirical study, this emerges foremost as a crude form of causality, or what Ullrich calls a “naïve-realism” (1994: 19).

(iii) *Towards the Cultural Differentiation of the Earth* (classes 7 and 8). In the Waldorf context the approach towards puberty is met with a further transformation in geographical representation and cognitive engagement. With the child more conscious of the complexity and impulses of his or her own personality, subject content shifts towards the cultural realm, focusing on the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa and/or Asia.⁴⁰ Based on this interplay between the child and the world, geography aims to nurture an empathy for different races and cultures, to ‘help the youngsters find a foothold in their search for their own inner soul life’ (Rawson et al 2000: 152). Furthermore, pupil’s emerging faculties of comprehension and judgement become a more important feature of the learning discourse. The theoretical framework of these representational and cognitive impulses in knowledge-building, explored empirically below, requires further consideration.

Firstly, based on the anthroposophical notion of “recapitulation”, class 7 geography is typically embedded in the historical year theme (the ‘Age of Discovery’) and, on Steiner’s advice, follows the history main lesson. The conceptual framework therefore conveys a strong impulse towards historical narrative, which, in practice, may translate into stories of colonial adventures. Moreover, in keeping with anthroposophy’s worldview, the geographical picture remains embedded in holistic notions of the natural region. For this reason, focus remains on the adaptation of indigenous peoples (for example, pygmies and American Indians) to the natural environment, presented as ‘archetypes of humanity’, such as hunters or herders (Brierley 2003: 36). Attention is therefore naturally drawn towards the idealised and exotic.

Secondly, although this idealized representation is a powerful element of the geographical imagination (a feature illustrated clearly below), as noted above, the more reflective and critical aspect of learning discourse are less certain. However, as highlighted in the following chapters, this may also be developed organically and, as shown in the different contexts, in various ways. Furthermore, representations may themselves be deepened by drawing on different perspectives, for example, by exploring

⁴⁰ These continents would be studied in European Waldorf schools.

indigenous people's 'confrontation with Western worldviews', or by focusing on the colonial 'destruction of nature' (Rawson et al: 151). The philosophical impulses underlying both of these dimensions of geographical learning will be explored further in the following section. Moreover, and as shown in my empirical study, in practice knowledge develops in close relation to the dynamics of each classroom discourse.

(iv) *The Earth as an Organism* (classes 9 to 12). In the upper school geography develops a wider ecological perspective by presenting the whole earth as a organism. Focusing initially on the mineral realm (class 9), the geographical picture widens by incorporating the rhythmical life-creating processes of the biosphere (class 10) and atmosphere (class 11), followed by the evolutionary context (class 12). In this biological framework geography therefore aims to respond to the physiological changes experienced during puberty, by transforming into eco-geography and focusing on the complex relationships between humans and the natural region. Based on an image of the adolescent withdrawing into the emerging soul life, geography aims to sustain the idea of belonging to a greater living system.

Corresponding to changes in the geographical picture is a transformation in pedagogy. As indicated above, anthroposophy associates puberty with a significant development in the child's cognitive faculty. Feelings now play a more refined role in thinking, which is now considered to function more independently and rationally. To meet this condition, a Goethean-phenomenological or contextual approach is widely adopted, taking observation as the starting point and therefore shifting the authority of knowledge creation, through the teacher's guidance, towards the pupil.⁴¹

Based on the understanding of the imagination as a self-contained organism, with the intuitive, synthetic capacity to grasp the processes shaping the world, this method aims to counteract the dualistic, analytical tendency, in so doing maintaining the bond between subject and object or the child and the world. In this respect geography's holistic representation of the world merges with epistemology, in what the curriculum guide describes as a 'living and plastic imagination of nature's forces' (Rawson and Richter: 152).

⁴¹ For geography, this method would involve more diverse forms of representation, such as slides and textual information.

2.4 Discussion and Conclusion

The preceding theoretical review of Waldorf's developmental approach to geography raises important issues regarding its epistemological and ontological framework. To broaden discussion and identify areas of ambiguity that will help to focus my empirical study, the philosophy guiding geography will now be considered further and in relation to a wider intellectual field.

Emerging from my previous analysis of pedagogy and the model for geography presented in this chapter is, arguably, an underlying tension in Waldorf's powerful learning discourse. On the one hand, with its aim to allow thinking to develop freely, pedagogy is grounded in the imaginative, pictorial dimension of knowledge transfer i.e. instruction as an 'imaginative transaction' (Nielsen 2003: 14). As shown above, subject knowledges are therefore organically developed by working with the child's natural, daily rhythms of waking and sleeping and, in a long-term developmental context, transformations in consciousness (according to the child's age). As indicated, this generally means that the cognitive element of learning follows from the imaginative, which becomes gradually more concrete in its representation as the child's intellect naturally evolves. In terms of pupil engagement and inclusion, this approach, attuned to the child's natural life processes, is perhaps the strongest feature of the knowledge-building process, as shown in the case studies below. On the other hand, whilst framed on the notion of freedom in a pedagogical sense, the worldview constructed carries powerful meanings embedded in anthroposophy's holistic vision. Hence, although based on a universal image of the child educated in freedom (an important reason for Waldorf's cross-cultural appeal), what is actually taught is inevitably positional. Important issues therefore arise regarding geography's philosophical framework.

On one level, what could be called anthroposophy's "metanarrative", or the body of knowledge explaining how the child's consciousness evolves in a human-centred universe, offers a clearly-defined developmental logic for a model of geographical learning. Thus, beginning from the child's natural perspective of being at the centre of the world, the geography curriculum extends outwards, as thinking moves from the body-sense sphere of lived experience (of the immediate surrounds), towards the head or intellect, led in stages from its main point of reference - the incarnating ego or self. Whilst this progression resonates with other empirically-based developmental theories (for example, the transition from the egocentric "topographic" to the "projective" stage in

Piaget's model), the explicit metaphysical framework of Steiner's model sets it apart. In this sense it is deepened but, arguably, also problematized, as a framework for geographical instruction.

In his comparison of Piaget's and Steiner's models, Brierley, for example, emphasizes how both associate the ability of the child to accommodate conceptual and representational views of space with the second seven-year period (1998: chapter 9).⁴² However, as he and others indicate (e.g. Ginsberg 1992, Ashley 2006), Steiner's model does not presuppose a linear development in the child's rational thinking, but one in which cognitive powers develop organically in direct relation to the way the spiritual being takes a hold of the physical organism (as shown in 1.3). Given this understanding, and as the developmental model of geography shows, the essential requirement is for taught knowledge, and therefore the child's thinking, to retain its imaginative quality.

Furthermore, in the wider, esoteric spheres of Steiner's evolutionary framework the concept of incarnation has deep implications for how the geography curriculum develops. As shown above, based on the notion of "recapitulation" the worldview presented, in its spatial, historical and holistic dimensions, closely follows Steiner's views on the evolution of human consciousness. Moreover, on closer scrutiny this arguably gains validity. The anthroposophical notion of "crossing of the Rubicon" in the ninth year, for example, clearly resonates with what Livingstone terms the 'Kantian turn' or the emergence of the 'unbridgeable chasm between mind and world' (Livingstone 1992: 113-7). As consciousness shifts from an intuitive, unified worldview towards close scrutiny of the sense world (from 'noumena' to 'phenomena', in Kantian terminology), the mythical dimension of geography is replaced by one more rational, and, in an empirical sense, more concrete. In this respect Steiner's evolutionary views on epistemology, drawing close parallels between the child's consciousness and the evolution of human thought, is a logical, developmental principle underpinning the curriculum framework.

In its wider evolutionary context this connection between the emerging self and spatial consciousness raises further issues regarding the positioning of knowledge. Identifying each school year with a stage in human history frames the geographical imagination in a particular way. In class 7, for example, as the child's consciousness becomes more outward-looking and engaged with the physical world, geography unites with the

⁴² In Piaget's "Projective" and "Euclidian" stages thinking becomes more conceptual and geometrical.

Enlightenment's scientific project of exploration, collation and description of new lands - what Livingstone describes as the 'triumph of empirical vision' (1992: 131). The conceptual framework upon which the geographical picture is constructed is therefore distinctly European. The Waldorf approach consolidates this perspective in two fundamental ways.

Firstly, what is meant by 'outward-looking' extends far deeper than the scientific-empirical understanding of development in the child's cognitive faculty. Rather, it is embedded in Steiner's anthropocentric cosmology and evolutionary notion of the self; in a discourse on human consciousness that is both developmental and Eurocentric.⁴³ Based on this framework, the geographical picture constructed is culturally positioned. For example, a standard feature of class 7 geography is the notion of journeying outwards from Europe, as on a voyage to discover new lands. In this sense, the self which discovers is historically aligned with the colonial impulse, which Wylie defines as a 'Eurocentric narrative in which human cultures are measured and known according to their place along the particular developmental path prescribed by the history of Europe' (2007: 183).⁴⁴

Secondly, and following from this impulse, is the nature of representation. If, as Wylie indicates, geographies that 'equate the faraway with the long ago' project onto indigenous peoples a colonial 'romantic fantasy of Arcadian innocence and oneness with nature' (2007: 183), then the conceptual framework of the Waldorf model arguably reinforces such a view. As highlighted above, the salient feature of the geographies considered here is the implicit assumption of the integrated natural region. Although, unlike the texts reviewed (in 2.2), school geography does not draw explicitly on the metaphysical dimension, the holistic principle dominates in the way humans are portrayed as physically and culturally united with their surrounds, showing how 'each element is integrated into the whole' (Brierley 2003: 54). In class 7, for example, the Waldorf approach leads directly from description of the physical environment (of continents) to the nature of indigenous peoples. However, as Brierley suggests in his curriculum indications, attempts should still be made to shift the perspective and describe

⁴³ 'Eurocentric' in the sense that Steiner's understanding of human consciousness is developmental, culminating in the present "fifth post-Atlantean epoch" or stage of evolution, which emerged in Europe.

⁴⁴ This historical impulse in geographical thought is explored by Felix Driver in *Geography Militant* (2001).

space ‘through the eyes of the people who live there’ (2003: 47). Whether this is actually the case is an empirical question and therefore considered below.

In conclusion, this theoretical review has identified key features of the philosophical framework underlying the Waldorf approach to geography. Two main elements of anthroposophy’s worldview are integrated in this method. Firstly, a holistic form of geographical knowledge; secondly, a pedagogical process informed by Steiner’s holistic understanding of the child. In practice, these elements unite in a unique and powerful learning discourse focused primarily on imaginative-pictures: their construction, recall and application. Probing into Waldorf’s holistic philosophy has, however, also identified areas of ambiguity and potential tension. Although the principle of an imaginative pedagogy offers a broader naturalistic perspective on learning, the imaginative framing of knowledge content, drawing on deep aspects of anthroposophy’s worldview, is potentially problematic. For example, in the Waldorf schema for geography, the notion of a globally conscious and reflective pre-adolescent, or even younger child, appears undervalued. Furthermore, regional identities in the eighty or so years since Steiner formulated his educational model have become increasingly blurred, suggesting that spatial definitions, to some extent, need updating.

To illustrate and explore further these areas of Waldorf geography’s philosophical framework, this study will now focus on classroom practice. Whilst theory suggests a powerful and cohesive framework for Waldorf’s learning discourse, in practice this depends primarily on how it is interpreted and implemented by the teacher. Through an analysis of various discourses surrounding Waldorf main lessons this study will therefore move away from the view that the Waldorf approach is closely bound to theory or “method”, to consider different contexts of practice. This will highlight Waldorf’s unique learning environment and the importance attached to the social milieu of the class. Furthermore, the philosophy considered here will be viewed from the position Steiner intended; as body of knowledge to be personally interpreted and applied in the class context. For reasons that have emerged in this theoretical review and considered further below, this empirical study will focus on geography lessons for the pre-adolescent.

Chapter 3

Empirical Study

3.0 Introduction: General Aims and Structure of Study

This part of the thesis will explore further the philosophy underpinning the Waldorf approach to geography by focusing on classroom practice. As has so far been shown, whilst Steiner's philosophy offers a comprehensive framework for pedagogy and subject knowledge, this is grounded in the general anthroposophical understanding of the child rather than detailed curriculum indications. Furthermore, in the spirit of the Waldorf approach, teachers are free to interpret this schema. Hence, whilst Steiner's worldview can be considered a powerful metanarrative guiding instruction, it should not be assumed that the model of geography outlined above (2.3) determines practice. Nor should the effect of Waldorf's unique class context and close teacher-pupil relations be underestimated. Moreover, given the wide gap between theory and practice, neither should it be assumed that the ambiguities identified in Waldorf's conceptual framework are not, to some extent, resolved in practice. By focusing on different discourses surrounding classroom practice this study will therefore aim to:

- (i) Illustrate how pedagogy and subject knowledge are integrated in Waldorf's narrative method. By considering classroom discourse in different contexts the versatility of knowledge construction within the Waldorf schema will be highlighted.
- (ii) Evaluate the process of knowledge-building, paying particular attention to how teachers work with the archetypes (of the child and the world) examined in the previous two chapters.

Having discussed the criteria for a suitable methodological framework to achieve these aims (3.1), this investigation will proceed by interpreting a range of qualitative data in the order in which it was collected, for reasons considered below. This is organized in two main parts. The first part (this chapter), intended as a preliminary exploration of practice, explores three types of data. Firstly, a sample of lessons that I taught and recorded during the early stage of this research (3.2). Secondly, transcripts of interviews with three Waldorf class teachers that explore their views on teaching geography (3.3). Thirdly, recorded observations of main lessons taught by a small sample of lower school teachers (3.4). Given these different contexts of data collection, it was felt necessary that

methodology was, as much as possible, both adaptable and sensitive to a range of field experiences. Consistency of method is discussed below.

Based on what emerges from this study the second part (chapter 4) then focuses specifically on geography taught to class 7 (for 12 to 13 year olds). Three main lesson blocks on similar themes, and taught by teachers in different schools, were observed and their learning strategies and knowledge content analyzed. These more extended periods of fieldwork gave me the opportunity to not only observe how knowledge is built up over longer periods of time, but to also explore, in more depth, key areas of classroom practice. This involved a dialogue with teachers, discussing their motivations and intentions. During this stage of the fieldwork the importance of teacher-pupil relations in the lesson context also became more evident.

In the two previous chapters the conceptual framework of Waldorf pedagogy and anthroposophically-inspired geography was shown to overlap with other schools of thought. However, finding a research method to investigate classroom practice that connected with the Waldorf philosophy proved more challenging. Given my close relationship with Steiner education and wishing to engage with its imaginative pedagogy, this was a problem I had to resolve.

3.1 Problematizing Methodology: Search for a Suitable Framework to Study Classroom Practice

If one is freed from methodological constraint one is in turn freed to depend on one's own experience. Those things are available to us because we are all members of a species that commonly inhabits and shares the same universe and the experiences it offers, sharing understandings and meaning-making (Thomas 2007: 137).

Just as Steiner's educational philosophy stands outside the rational-scientific framework of modern state education (1.1), so does its imaginative method and broader learning goals problematize any theoretical attempt to understand it. Moving from Waldorf teacher to researching practice therefore led to an epistemological question - can methods of knowledge-creation embedded in academic discourse, with its own intellectual and analytical framework, capture the imaginative dimension of Waldorf practice? Previous

research on Waldorf education has tended not address this issue, for two reasons. Firstly, because practice is approached using scientific-empirical methods of investigation. In his analysis of the effectiveness of Waldorf class teaching, for example, Ashley constructed a ‘pedagogical flow analysis’ to quantify pupil interruptions to teachers’ narratives or “presentations” (2006).¹ Elsewhere, more qualitative approaches have used descriptive, narrative-style vignettes to portray lessons or have relied on interviews with teachers to explore their objectives (e.g. Woods et al 2005, Ashley 2005, Oberski 2006). Using these approaches, distancing from the educational process, particularly the experiential dimension of knowledge transaction, is arguably intrinsic to the method of interpretation (with the notable exception of Nielsen’s 2003 phenomenological study of lesson discourse). Secondly, because studies of practice have been ‘within Waldorf’ and hence largely illustrative and unreflective (e.g. Finser 1994). Moreover, the very few academic studies that consider Waldorf within its own agenda tend not to focus in-depth on the realities of classroom discourse (e.g. Masters 1996, Mazzone 1999).

It is the aim of this research, however, to investigate the Waldorf approach academically, and in the lesson context, without being constrained by methodological theory. Given my own involvement with the education this meant it would be inappropriate to attempt to position myself as an outsider to its system of shared meanings and intentions. However, staying close to the educational discourse does not imply my analysis would be inaccessible or not of value to a wider audience, nor that ambiguities and tensions within practice could not be identified and explored. Given the nature of the learning method and context under investigation I therefore felt that research method had to engage with the following:

Waldorf’s orally-based imaginative pedagogy. For reasons discussed above, subject teaching is not closely controlled by curriculum specifications or cognitively-defined learning goals, but relies heavily on the free, creative process of building knowledge through descriptive narrative and recall. To engage with the Waldorf approach, the focus of study therefore needed to be on classroom discourse (teacher narratives and teacher-pupil dialogue), with interpretation sensitive to the imaginative-pictorial dimension of learning. Attention also needed to be given to the way knowledge is built up organically over time.

¹ For example, as shown above, a number of studies have attempted to quantify Waldorf pupils’ levels of achievement.

The context of teacher and class. Given the freedom allowed in classroom practice, it was important to consider lessons from the viewpoint of individual teachers. This would hopefully indicate how personal aims and interpretations of Waldorf philosophy affect the knowledge-building process, as well as generate a dialogue to explore opinions. Consideration also needed to be given to the role that relations between teachers and pupils have on the exchange of knowledge, including the class atmosphere and the general vitality of lesson discourse.

To establish a workable method involved, in the first place, an inquiry into research methodologies. At the outset, quantitative methods were discounted because they attempt to reduce reality to formulae rather than engage with the experience and deeper meaning of classroom discourse and knowledge transfer. Nor were they considered appropriate methods to study an educational system that does not have quantifiable learning goals. Qualitative approaches, however, rather than offering an easy solution, raised issues regarding my own views on knowledge, making the adoption of an established method unsuitable. Nevertheless, considering different methodologies gave theoretical clarity to my own epistemological position.

Foremost, a predetermined theoretical approach would clearly contradict the epistemological framework examined in this research, which requires a more intuitive and organic process of inquiry. This is also a position I personally support. Moreover, based on the view that knowledge gains more meaning if it is grounded in experience, the interpretive process is, arguably, also brought closer to the phenomena being investigated.³ This is a view supported by Thomas in his critique of the hegemony of theory in educational research, with its 'faith in rationalism: a faith that good logical reflection and thinking can result in theories - of whatever kind - that will explain and predict aspects of the educational world' (2007: 77). Acknowledging that the 'technology of rationality and theory' marginalizes approaches that rely on 'imagination, curiosity and innovation' (2007: 78) or more 'personal and idiosyncratic' methods of interpretation (2007: 116), Thomas highlights the ontological assumptions and epistemological limitations inherent in methodological theory.

On the one hand, method that relies on the application of a predetermined procedure

³ In the phenomenological sense that understanding of the world is achieved primarily through direct experience rather than applying intellectual schemata.

generates a theoretically-determined interpretation of the world. In this respect epistemological security rests on the assumption that the world is knowable from a position of neutrality, existing independently of the researcher. However, given the epistemological impulse underpinning the practice investigated in this thesis (essentially phenomenological and intuitive), as well as its ontological framework (based on a metaphysical worldview), such a theoretical approach would be unsuitable. On the other hand, method that develops freely and in close relation to the contexts of field experience, whilst building a perspectival knowledge, arguably penetrates more deeply into reality. According to Thomas, this means allowing understanding to emerge through engagement with the various discourses surrounding classroom practice. Although, taken to its logical conclusion, this viewpoint arguably questions the need to define any methodology (in the sense that theorizing procedure will undermine the intuitive element), it nevertheless provides a useful point from which to begin. In this respect, by ‘marking the parameters of rationality’s utility when we are thinking about teaching and learning’ frees research to explore and invent different ways of knowing (Thomas 2007: 92).

Given the tensions highlighted in my theoretical analysis and the aims of this empirical study, method would have to both engage with the imaginative dimension of knowledge transaction and also critically reflect on its forms of representation. Inspired by the idea of an integrative approach that allows meaning to emerge from both phenomenological (experiential) and discursive modes of inquiry (focusing more critically on the positioning of knowledge or its underlying worldview), led to a search through established methodologies. Although, to a certain extent, this highlighted what Thomas describes as the problem of ‘industrial-scale training in epistemology, ontology and research method currently provided by higher degree courses in education’ (2007: 92), this also enabled me to develop a methodological framework to suit my own philosophical position and research aims. Three broad areas of qualitative research methods, embedded in what Guba and Lincoln describe as ‘competing paradigms’ or belief systems, were seriously considered (1994: 105):

Discourse analysis. In a Foucauldian sense, learning in the Waldorf context is embedded in a discourse of meanings and educational goals based on Steiner’s metaphysical worldview. One possible route of inquiry is therefore an analysis of learning discourse to identify, for example, the ideological framework and cultural positioning of the knowledge taught. However, although Waldorf geography is grounded in

anthroposophy's holistic, non-dualistic worldview, and makes certain assumptions regarding people and nature, a purely critical, discursive approach would fail to engage with Waldorf's wider ontological framework and intention. In this sense the assumption of 'world-making' through language, discourse and text' (Usher 1996: 27), or reality constructed through the signifying system of language, undermines the existence of an extra-discursive, metaphysical realm, including the transcendental dimensions of self and thought (Game 1991). Therefore, although it is important to consider how classroom discourse generates a particular worldview through the construction of knowledge (Mercer 1995), the philosophical assumptions of such a method, to reiterate Thomas, mark the parameters of its utility. Essentially, whereas the poststructural ontological framework of the self 'decentred and enmeshed in the text of the world' places epistemological limits on knowledge (Usher 1996: 28), anthroposophy's premodern view of a human-centred metaphysically-ordered universe, with only self-imposed conceptual boundaries to knowledge, challenges the relativist viewpoint.⁵ Whilst such a view depends on belief in what Usher call a 'metaphysics of presence' (ibid: 28), the notion that the human imagination transcends discourse to encapsulate a realm of soul-aesthetic and spiritual or universal meaning, is a fundamental principle of the philosophy and practice explored here. Hence, analysis of the discourse surrounding classroom practice is only appropriate from within Waldorf's holistic philosophical framework and system of meanings.

Interpretive-hermeneutic approach. The notion of understanding as a 'learning experience involving 'dialogue' between ourselves as researchers and that which we are trying to understand' (Usher 1996: 22) resonates with my own views and the educational context being investigated, for two reasons. Firstly, whilst, on the one hand, anthroposophy exists as a body of objective knowledge (Steiner's ontological claim), it is also an epistemology grounded in the individual's interpretation of his or her lived experience (1.2). Hence, although it does not share constructivism's antifoundational, relativist ontology, it is sympathetic towards what Guba et al call a 'transactional and subjectivist epistemology' (1994: 111).⁶ For this reason, a hermeneutic approach that generates meaning from the personal interpretation of various field experiences is an

⁵ In Steiner's ontology the poststructural position is essentially reversed; it is the universe that frames discourse and not vice-versa.

⁶ As shown above, Steiner's epistemology intends to act as a bridge between the physical context and the metaphysical or universal.

appropriate path to understanding. Secondly, exploring interpretive frameworks guiding classroom practice acknowledges the importance of both researcher and respondents' immersion in the underlying philosophy. Understanding may then be achieved through dialogue exploring different interpretive schemata - an epistemological framework conceptualized by Gadamer as a "double hermeneutic" (1975, see also Schwandt 1989). Exploring different interpretations and personal meanings associated with the same educational theory therefore suited both the wider epistemological impulse and the context of the practice being studied. A loosely-structured, hermeneutic approach also offered considerable freedom as a knowledge-building framework and relied heavily on engagement with the various discourses surrounding practice. Exploring these would also be of value to both respondents involved in this study as well as those in the wider Waldorf teaching community (Schwandt 1996).

Grounded theory. Although initially drawn by the idea that theory could emerge from ethnographic data grounded in the lived experience of school practice (following the method of Glaser and Strauss 1967), in accord with other critiques and revisions of grounded theory its ontological and epistemological assumptions were considered problematic. Foremost, essentially informed by a realist ontology, it still elevates theory's status, rather than the subjective experience and interpretative schema of the researcher. Whilst acknowledging that attempts have been made to revise this position from interpretive and poststructural viewpoints (e.g. Annells 1996, Charmaz 2000, Piantanida et al 2004), these tend to fall back on the notion that intuition, or what Piantanida calls the 'aha moment' (2004: 13), is the key element in theory's generation. Moreover, acknowledging that a conceptual leap has to be made to extract meaning from data challenges the dictum that theory, as a framework for understanding, or as an epistemological goal, is a superior form of knowledge. This is a view expounded by Thomas (2006) and others (e.g. Schatzman 1991, Eisner 1993) who question whether theoretical procedures have any more purchase on reality than allowing meanings to emerge on an intuitive level, directly from experience. Furthermore, it is highly questionable whether theory, no matter how contextual or partial, is an appropriate goal for research exploring the unique ethnographically-rich contexts of practice.⁷ Nevertheless, in keeping with the general principle of a grounded theory approach, this study does aim to identify patterns through gradual immersion in school-based practice, as a means to make general statements about its underlying philosophy. However,

⁷ As noted above, this is an area of qualitative research explored by Hammersley (1992).

important reservations are held concerning grounded theory's assumptions regarding both the beginning and end points of research. As such, the assumptions that meanings somehow emerge from the field rather than the researcher's own interpretive schema, and that theory is the ultimate goal of inquiry, are not upheld.

Reflecting on the underlying philosophy of these different methods, and considering the context and aims of this research, it was therefore decided to adopt a flexible hermeneutic approach that could elicit meanings from a range of discourses surrounding classroom practice. Such a methodological framework would remain sensitive to both the worldview informing practice and its educational goals, as well as the need for Waldorf to reflect on, and potentially update, its own position. Moreover, the two defining characteristics of the Waldorf approach to knowledge-building - its imaginative transaction and holistic form of representation - requires both experiential and more critical, theoretical modes of engagement and interpretation. For this reason, this study aims to balance analysis of practice with a sensitivity towards its underlying spiritual principles and educational goals.

Given this framework, method develops organically in relation to the data collected. Through a combination of interviews and lesson observations it was intended to gain a clear sense of the contexts of practice; to engage with both the subjectivity of teachers' aims and objectives as well as the social milieu in which knowledge exchange is embedded. Such an ideographic approach develops incrementally as attention moves from case to case, drawing on their unique ethnographic detail.

Furthermore, as indicated above, it was important that method maintained a degree of versatility and consistency across a range of different fieldwork contexts. Meaning is therefore extracted in a way that remains sensitive to both the nature and intentions of the different discourses and how they were experienced - a process that required, at times, a degree of self-reflexivity to document and connect the various parts of the study. Moreover, in common with a hermeneutic approach understanding develops incrementally and in an iterative way, drawing comparisons between the case studies as they are considered in turn, and moving between theory and practice. Finally, since the emerging intellectual faculty of the pre-adolescent child represents more of a potential challenge to Waldorf's imaginative pedagogy, it was decided to focus on the upper end of the lower school (age 11 to 13). Methodology is considered further below.

3.2 Reflections on Personal Practice

3.2.1 Aims and Method

My empirical study begins by focusing on a sample of lessons that I taught and recorded during the early stages of this research.⁸ Although not intended as an in-depth participant observation, this analysis is a useful means to begin this empirical study, for four reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the Waldorf approach to knowledge-building in a main lesson context over a three-day cycle. Secondly, drawing on my own interpretation of how the underlying philosophy informs practice highlights the subjectivity of the Waldorf approach, particularly the importance attached to personal meanings and objectives (a difficult area to penetrate when considering other teachers' practice). The reader therefore becomes better informed of my own position in subsequent dialogues and analyses. Thirdly, it identifies areas of ambiguity in the knowledge-building process identified in my theoretical review. Furthermore, as my entry into the analysis of practice this exercise also helped to generate themes for discussion with other teachers (3.3). Fourthly, the topic of these lessons was shared with two further case studies (considered in the following chapter) and therefore provides a useful comparison.⁹ Although the lessons considered here were taught to an older class, the themes that arise resonate with these other examples.

As noted above, attempts have been made to adjust the method of interpretation to the fieldwork experience. However, each context imposes certain limits on the data that can be collected and therefore what can be inferred from it. In this study, whilst I was able to keep a written record of the lessons, including brief extracts of dialogue with the class, my involvement affected the recording of data and my interpretation of the lesson.¹⁰ As such, unlike the studies that follow, this example is more a narrative of lesson content than a detailed analysis of teacher-pupil exchanges (this is explored in more detail in 3.3 and chapter 4). Moreover, my role as teacher, as well as my close relationship to the class, made it difficult to evaluate the learning atmosphere. However, the hermeneutic data was enriched through dialogue with the class, when pupils were invited to feed back on the lessons.

⁸ Fifteen lessons were recorded in total from October 31 to November 18 2006.

⁹ It should be stressed that this study does not intend to be a comparative analysis.

¹⁰ Given the potential disruption to lessons, in-class recording was considered undesirable. For this reason notes were recorded in a lesson journal.

As discussed in the previous section, I felt it important to find a balance between representation of Waldorf's holistic approach to learning (its rhythmic structure, day-to-day development etc.) and analysis of pedagogical process and knowledge content. For this reason, lessons content is presented, in the form of vignettes, before it is interpreted. Attention therefore moves from the lesson as a whole to an analysis of its parts, including brief extracts of discourse. This focuses on both the method used to construct knowledge and engage pupils, as well as areas of tension. Finally, attention should be drawn towards the gap between the moment of data collection and analysis. The classroom practice considered here reflects my interpretation of the educational philosophy at that time, prior to the more reflective view that subsequent research generated. The changing position of my own voice in this investigation is highlighted further as the study progresses.

3.2.2 School and Class Context

This medium-sized school of approximately two hundred pupils was part of the second wave of Steiner schools to develop in the UK (mostly in the 1970s and 1980s), primarily as parent-led initiatives, inspired by Waldorf's holistic philosophy and as an alternative to the mainstream. A notable feature of the school was its vibrant, friendly and informal atmosphere, reflected in close relationships amongst staff and between teachers and pupils. Although undergoing financial hardship, the school was forward-looking, having recently developed an upper school taking pupils up to sixteen years old.

As with many smaller, pioneering schools, both the anthroposophical culture as well as the formal support structures for teachers were still developing.¹¹ Although this arguably enabled teachers to work more freely and creatively than in more established schools, it also made working conditions more stressful. This was reflected in a high staff turnover, with very few class teachers completing the cycle from class 1 to 8. As such, there were few experienced class teachers. Further details of this school and how it compares with the others in this study are given in the following section.

Class 8 were a mixed ability class of fourteen pupils (thirteen girls and one boy, aged thirteen to fourteen), nine of whom had joined from state schools in the previous year.¹²

¹¹ For example, difficulties with cover for staff illness and the general upkeep of the school.

¹² This is a common feature of Waldorf schools towards the upper end of the lower school.

Being a small class, the group had developed particularly close bonds, although this is usually the case with Steiner classes. Since taking over the class twelve months before this study I had taught a range of main lessons and been generally impressed by both pupils' engagement and responses to the lesson content, particularly the high quality of their artwork (see examples below).¹³ Although my relationship with the class was not as developed, nor, for this reason, as intuitive as those I subsequently observed, ¹⁴I would describe it as relaxed, informal and productive.

3.2.3 Aims and Content of Lessons

The general aim of this three-week main lesson block was to present a broad geography of Africa framed on the idea of the natural region, by drawing on the interrelationships between indigenous peoples, animals and the physical environment. Although following Waldorf tradition by using holistic imagery and narrative, to a certain extent knowledge content and method were also personalized. Foremost, I intended to focus on building up a picture of different eco-regions (based on the descriptive, synthetic method adopted by Suchantke 2001) and withhold from using a historical narrative. Representation was therefore based primarily on detailed description of different objects in the environment, to portray their qualities and indicate the principles that unite them. Whilst a descriptive, phenomenological approach to knowledge-building is an important feature of Waldorf main lessons (1.3), I adopted a purer form than is normal for this age group, relying heavily on pupils' ability to grasp ideas intuitively from the image content and allowing considerable freedom of interpretation, through writing and painting. The level of artistic ability of this class was therefore a factor determining method. Furthermore, this meant paying particular attention to the imaginative-pictorial element of my intended presentation; to use narrative to evoke a vivid sense of place. I prepared for this by studying pictures of African landscapes and various travel journals, from which key images emerged as the framework for each presentation. Slides showing landscapes were also used. Whilst lessons were planned around these images and concepts relating to them, I had no intention of placing tight controls on classroom discourse, other than to follow the traditional threefold lesson structure (1.4).

The following vignettes draw on content from the second, third and fourth lessons of a

¹³ This was my second class at the same school.

¹⁴ This would be expected, given that my time with the class had been relatively short.

block of fifteen.¹⁵ This cycle moves from a portrait of the whole African continent (lessons 1 and 2) to a focus on the different natural regions (the savanna, Sahel, Nile Valley, Sahara and rainforest). The format for documenting these lessons closely followed lesson structure. Approximately forty minutes of lesson time was given to both presentation and application. Each recall sequence continued for about twenty minutes.

Lesson 2

During the previous lesson I had briefly described the size and shape of Africa as well as the diversity of climates and landscapes. This lesson aimed to develop, as a characterization, an image of the whole continent.

Recall. Drawing on what had been said yesterday, I asked the class what Africa would be like if it was a person. Responses included '*old*', '*mysterious*' and '*poor*'. I then asked how Africa and Europe would compare as people. Responses included '*more fragile*', '*more isolated*' and '*deeper*'. Following this I inquired how a person living in a remote part of the continent might compare with a European. Responses included '*less materialistic*', '*working closer to nature*' and '*living harder lives*'. I then drew an outline of Africa on the blackboard and asked pupils to compare it with the imaginary maps they had drawn on the previous day. It was noticed that Africa was an easier continent to draw than Europe. Having indicated its smoother coastline, I asked how this feature might have originated. With no answers forthcoming I explained that, unlike Africa, the coastline of Europe had been formed by the movement of ice, rivers and fluctuations in sea level. I then introduced the idea of the continent as a 'shield' lying low and stable in the earth's crust.

Presentation. I began by reading an extract from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which describes the strangeness of the rainforest environment and the sense of alienation the narrator experiences as he travels deeper into the interior.¹⁶ I then drew on my own experiences to describe in vivid detail what it feels like to be deep in the forest. I concluded with a brief description of the more mysterious beliefs and practices of African cultures, including animism and witchcraft.

Application. The class were instructed to copy my outline map into their main lesson books and write a description of the main physical characteristics of the continent, as an introduction. Key facts were listed on the blackboard to guide the class.

Lesson 3

This lesson aimed to present a vivid picture of the savanna, focusing on its seasonal rhythms and the dominance of animal life.

Recall. Pupils were asked to draw on yesterday's presentation and describe Africa's

¹⁵ This sample of lessons were chosen because they clearly illustrate the theme of the main lesson block and how knowledge was developed over a three day cycle.

¹⁶ The rainforest was covered in detail during the following week.

distinctive features. During this question and answer sequence one pupil raised the point that my representation was culturally positioned, indicating that *'Africa isn't mysterious to Africans!'* It was then agreed that whereas the African environment is more extreme than Europe's and people live closer to nature, viewpoints are subjective. I asked how European explorers may have viewed the continent. One pupil replied, *'through greed and adventure!'* I then stressed that Europeans had had strong motivations, including the perception of nature as a resource to be exploited. However, the hostility of Africa's natural environment - its size, climate and terrain - had initially kept colonizers at bay.

Presentation. This began with a description of the movements of the sun over the plains and its effect on the seasonal rains. I asked the class to imagine the heat of the sun directly overhead and how the landscape dries up and 'dies'. This was illustrated with slides showing the orange earth and sunlight at the height of the dry season. I then described how new life appears when the rains come, with the landscape transformed by colour, movement, smells and sounds. The point was made that large animals dominate and characterize this space, roaming freely and migrating in search of fresh grass. Following this, I gave three cameos of animal life: a description of the movement of lions when hunting, the symbiotic relationship between the grazing antelope and the acacia tree, and the buffalo and egret. A slide was shown of zebra on the plains to indicate the contrasts between light and shade.

Application. Pupils developed their descriptions of Africa and a selection were read aloud. I shaded the savanna regions on the blackboard map and the pupils copied this onto their own. To conclude the lessons pupils drew on the corresponding nation-states, referring to the atlas.

Lesson 4

This lesson aimed to develop the portrait of the savanna, describing how animals and people are embedded in the natural region.

Recall. Using a question and answer sequence, a number of concepts were elicited and clarified. Firstly, having asked a pupil to describe how the movement of the sun and rainfall are related, I gave a topological definition of the 'tropics' and 'equator'. Secondly, I asked in what sense the savanna had a rhythmic quality. Responses included: *'the way the climate changes'*, *'light and shade'*, *'the sex life of lions!'* and *'life and death.'* I suggested that very large mammals require large open spaces to evolve physiologically and express their inner, or soul, life and drives. This initiated a discussion regarding whether animals had a soul and how they were different to humans. The concept of adaptation was then clarified. Thirdly, having asked pupils to describe the connections between climate, vegetation and animals, I gave definitions of the terms 'ecosystem' and 'symbiosis'.

Presentation. Pupils were given pictures of five large animals (rhino, buffalo, impala, vulture and lion). I described the bodily form and behaviour of each species, drawing on its close connection with the environment (for example, how the lions' physiology and behaviour encapsulates the rhythms and balance of the wider biome).¹⁷ I then showed the class an aerial photograph of a Himba enclosure, asking pupils to describe the impression

¹⁷ This draws directly on Suchantke's anthroposophically-inspired eco-geography (2001), as discussed above.

their settlement had made on the earth.¹⁸ A general comparison was then made with farming practices in the UK. This led to a discussion about the contrasting relationships to nature between indigenous peoples and Europeans.

Application. Pastel drawings of the savanna were then made from imagination (see Figures 1 and 2). To conclude the lesson pupils were then asked to write a descriptive account of the main features of the biome.

The remainder of this main lesson block built up similar holistic portraits of Africa's other natural regions. For example, presentation of the rainforest focused on the dominant metabolic principle and description of its life-forms. Indigenous peoples were also described in close relation to nature. Following this, threats to the balance of each biome were considered. Pupils wrote descriptive accounts and drew illustrations of the different regions (see below). To conclude this topic, I suggested that if the whole continent is thought of as an organism with interdependent parts, knowledge is deepened, both ecologically and spiritually.

3.2.4 Analysis and Discussion

These vignettes give a clear impression of the Waldorf approach in practice, as well as indicating areas of potential tension that warrant further inquiry. This analysis will therefore briefly consider the general intentions, quality and structure of classroom discourse, as it relates to the lesson archetype and its underlying rationale, followed by a more critical analysis of pedagogy and knowledge content.

The cameos above clearly indicate the traditional lesson structure and related sequence of classroom discourse (as shown in 1.4). With the intention of allowing the imaginative-pictorial element of knowledge to undergo a transformation into a more clearly-defined idea or concept, pedagogy has a rhythmic structure, organised into sequences of descriptive narrative ('presentation') and questioning and answering ('recall'), interspersed with sleep. Although difficult to evaluate the outcomes of such a method, the general level of pupils' engagement, recall and artistic rendering of knowledge is strong evidence that this learning method is effective. This also suggests that pupils are absorbed on an imaginative level. Furthermore, to use Alexander's terminology, the 'cognitive pace' of learning achieves some momentum (during recall in lesson 4, for example, a total of seven concepts are elicited). In this respect knowledge-building integrates, and arguably achieves a balance between, both intuitive-imaginative and rational-cognitive modes of thought. Moreover, given that the geographical image develops incrementally through detailed description of the world, it achieves both a mobility and a concreteness, in the way that Steiner intended (2.2). Analysis of learning method, including the picture

¹⁸ The Himba are a native tribe of Namibia.



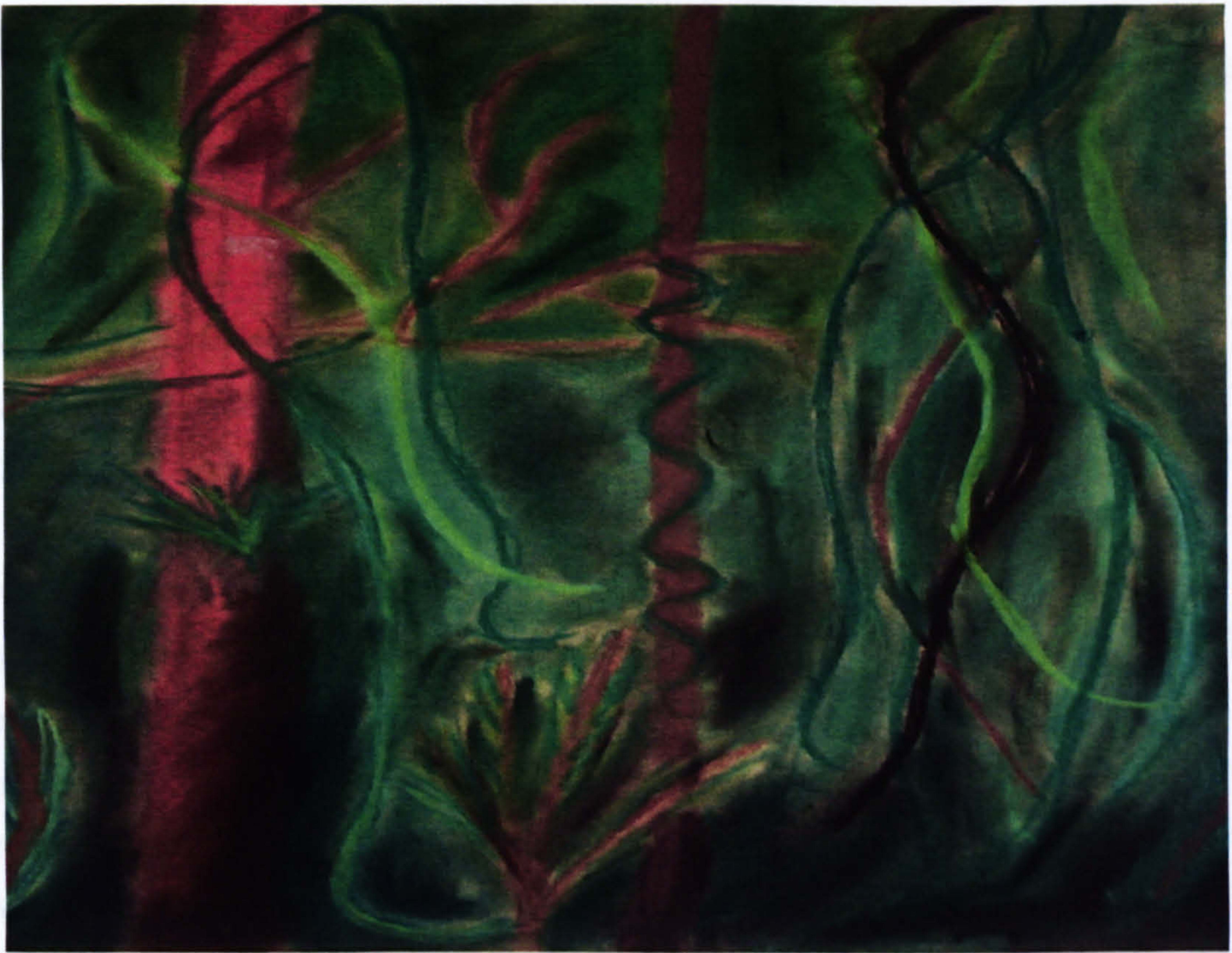
Figures 1 and 2: Pupils' impressions of desert landscapes

Figures 1 and 2: Examples of pupils' pastel drawings of the African savanna



Figures 3 and 4: Pupils' impressions of desert landscapes

Figures 5 and 6: Pupils' impressions of the rainforest



Figures 5 and 6: Pupils' impressions of the rainforest.

built and consolidated, can be developed further by drawing on the views of pupils as well as a broader theoretical field.

After the lessons I asked pupils what they thought about during the presentations.¹⁹ Their responses highlighted both the teacher's challenge of sustaining engagement and how the pedagogical impact of one's own voice can, to a certain extent, be misinterpreted.

Responses included:

'What's he saying and when is it break?'

'Mostly what he's saying, but sometimes my mind wandered and I started thinking about stuff, like what I was going to do after school.'

'What the teacher is saying and having a picture of it in my mind.'

'What it would be like if I was there.'

'I try to keep as focused as I can, but I seem to sometimes drift off into my own little dreamland.'

'Once a subject gets my attention I start listening.'

'I wonder what that means?'

'Aha!'

I then asked pupils how they thought the lessons could have been improved. Responses suggested an element of tension with learning method and knowledge taught:

'The teacher could probably get us a bit more involved.'

'He should ask us more questions and not talk so much.'

'More drawings and not just talking all the time.'

'I think we should have learned more about different countries and their traditions.'

'More facts about different countries.'

Although caution should be taken interpreting from pupil feedback, it nevertheless highlights certain problematic areas of learning strategy. Foremost, whilst the descriptive element of a presentation can sometimes fail to inspire an imagination, it may also neglect the intellectual process. In this respect, and important for the direction of this research, these responses led to a deeper, personal reflection on the extent to which the Waldorf focus on imaginative pedagogy marginalizes the cognitive and critical element of thinking and learning, and, if so, whether this is necessarily problematic. Whilst I felt these lessons had succeeded as an imaginative transaction of knowledge, these responses

¹⁹ Pupil feedback on this was handwritten.

suggested that pupils needed to more intellectually engaged.

Furthermore, whereas it had been my intention to construct holistic pictures of Africa based on the idea of the natural region and, from an anthroposophical perspective, the metaphysical unifying principle, my representation raises questions. Whilst the integrity of the geographical picture arguably lies in the synthetic quality and inherent unity of the image, the way it portrays the relationship between animals, man and nature, carries powerful, culturally-embedded meanings. Drawing on the pre-technological rather than the modern, the exotic rather than the familiar, although a fertile ground for rich imagery, conveys an image which essentially equates the 'far away with the long ago' (Wylie 2007: 183). From such a Eurocentric perspective issues of nationhood and development are largely excluded. The comment made by one pupil that 'Africa isn't mysterious to Africans' directly challenges such a position. The nation-state was also excluded as a form of spatial definition.

Finally, as a whole, each lesson shows how pedagogy and representation combine to form a powerful learning discourse. On the one hand, learning method depends on narrative to construct imaginative pictures, shaping knowledge in a holistic and highly subjective way. This approach excludes other forms of knowledge, such as text or media. On the other hand, although occasional discussion opens up the discourse to allow other viewpoints, the repetitive element intrinsic to learning method (the sequence of presentation, recall and application), rather than encouraging critical reflection, reinforces the teacher's meanings. Whilst difficult to perceive from the immersed position of the teacher, this emerges as a salient feature of classroom practice, raising issues regarding the Waldorf principle of learning through freedom.

In conclusion, whilst this short study illustrates both the intentions and process of knowledge-building based on the Waldorf schema, it highlights the anthroposophical archetypes upon which learning is based. In this respect, and as the preceding chapters have shown, two areas of potential tension emerge. Firstly, given Steiner's image of the child and the significance attached to the pictorial element of knowledge, it remains unclear whether the child's emerging intellectual faculty is sufficiently rigorously engaged. Secondly, on the evidence of this example, the conceptual framework and integrity of geography's essentially holistic imagination - the all-encompassing natural region - excludes other forms of representation. The question therefore emerges regarding

the way the underlying philosophy shapes learning discourse, as a process that both constructs pictures of the world and attempts to engage pupils in different modes of thought. To consider this question further, attention now turns towards other class teachers' views on practice, to explore the way Waldorf philosophy is more widely interpreted as a framework for learning. Although, at first, these dialogues are removed from the lesson context (study 3.3), they still prove useful as a means to situate my own approach within a broader field of interpretations. From this wider perspective a clearer understanding is achieved of how the lessons documented here reflect my own immersion and views on the philosophy at the time they were taught.

3.3 Exploring Practice: Interviews with Class Teachers

3.3.1 Aims and Method

As shown above, given that the Waldorf approach relies heavily on the teacher's interpretation of the underlying philosophy, particularly anthroposophy's holistic understanding of the child, one would expect considerable variation in classroom practice. The next stage of my inquiry therefore sought a wider perspective by considering the views of three colleagues interviewed shortly after I recorded my own lessons. The general aim of this exercise was to generate dialogues exploring teachers' learning strategies and how they represented the world. I felt that in-depth interviews with a small number of teachers would highlight, in more detail than a questionnaire survey, for example, the personal motivations and intentions behind classroom practice. Being an insider and having good working relationships with the respondents was also advantageous.

As intended, these interviews explore practice in relation to the conceptual framework of the philosophy that underpins it. Dialogue is therefore embedded in the discourse of anthroposophy - its general worldview, shared meanings, educational aims and naturalistic method. As noted, it had never been my intention to assume a position of neutrality in this investigation, but rather to acknowledge my own immersion and position. At times the following exchanges therefore move from moments of agreement to tension, which adds to their meaning and interest. Whilst drawing on a narrower field of experience than the following lesson observations, talk about practice nevertheless generated interesting hermeneutic data, allowing both a review and exchange of viewpoints. This adds to the overall richness of data in this empirical study.

As with any interpretation of data, understanding carries epistemological and ontological assumptions. As highlighted above, the possibility of generating knowledge organically from diverse and subjective experiences, rather than theoretical procedure, is essential to the epistemological framework and heuristic approach of this research. In this sense, whilst each dialogue draws on individual viewpoints, the meaning elicited, although perspectival and embedded in its own community narrative, nevertheless has some purchase on reality. The postmodernist view that the reality of interview data is 'ambiguous, relative and unknowable' is therefore rejected (Scheurich 1997: 67). Rather, it is acknowledged that although participation in a discourse involves a co-construction of meanings, they have universal relevance. This resonates with Thomas's viewpoint that, since we share the same universe and the experiences it offers, we also share the same understandings and meaning-making (2007: 137).

Consistent with my methodological framework, portraits of teachers and lessons are drawn before analysis; this is considered an essential part of the inquiry's realism. Each study therefore begins with a brief biographical portrait of the respondent, illustrated with short extracts of dialogue. Analysis of interview data then proceeds with brief commentaries. Exchanges have been chosen that I felt most clearly illustrate each teacher's views regarding appropriate subject knowledge and learning method. In a short exploratory study of this kind, however, I have had to be selective. As with the lesson observations that follow, the study proceeds in the order in which the interviews were conducted. Likewise, analysis progresses in stages and recursively, giving attention to each respondent in turn but also drawing on previous examples. Although in the first interview the age group of the class referred to did not correspond with my own, it nevertheless raises questions of relevance to this study. However, all three respondents drew on their experience teaching children between twelve and fourteen years old.

3.3.2 Interview Data and Analyses

The first part of each interview explored personal motives for class teaching and general views on pedagogy. The focus then shifted towards geography. Although guided by a loose framework of questions, the interviews mostly followed themes of shared interest, regarding main lesson teaching, that arose spontaneously. Sequences involving exchanges of viewpoints therefore occasionally arise within the more structured interview format of question and answer. Whilst the respondents were all motivated by the

philosophy underpinning Waldorf education, it soon emerged that views on practice were considerably varied. Class teaching experience was particularly significant in this respect. It should be noted that two of the respondents had considerable experience, whereas the other was a relatively new to the task.

Teacher A, a class 6 teacher in his thirties, had been with his class since its inception. Respected amongst staff for the depth and rigour of his anthroposophical approach to teaching, and now working as a mentor for trainees, he indicated that his interest in matters spiritual had arisen some time before his encounter with anthroposophy. This had proved decisive during a period of postgraduate study:

A part of me thought it was a bit materialistic, that some aspect was not being addressed, but I would really like my job to include something which went beyond a physical worldview.

Regarding Teacher A's classroom practice, the motivation to work with the metaphysical principles of Waldorf pedagogy was clearly evident:²⁰

- I. *Can you say what is distinctive about the way we teach?*
R. *One is the idea of meditation and producing a main lesson that is made specifically for the pupils who are going to receive it. Perhaps that is made easier by bringing the children to mind before you do your preparation, so you know intuitively what would be the right thing to teach the next day. Also pictures, working in a pictorial way, and this journey from the pictorial to the abstract. You're giving them a picture and then superimposing it on an adult concept, and through looking at the two in juxtaposition you allow them to digest something which they wouldn't have been able to do in its original state.*
I. *How do you decide which picture to present to the class?*
R. *I suppose it's in the feeling realm really. I consider a couple of different pictures and then consider which one feels right. I suppose I feel it's more about the way you do it. Although the actual content of the curriculum is important and it meets the childrens' needs, it's not so important as the actual process and the fact that it's for them. They feel that. They feel cared for and thought about, and that's nourishing. It doesn't matter so much what particular picture you take, although I would choose a picture that speaks to their feeling realm. That's the most important thing.*

Highlighting the importance of knowledge as an imaginative transaction, rather than a mere acquisition of content, I probed further into this idea of knowledge as 'nourishment':

- I. *And what is 'food' for the pupils? How do you know it's good 'food'?*
R. *You can sense it as a teacher. If you've brought something that is really nourishing for them, there's a strange silence that descends on the lessons.. and in terms of classroom management there's nothing you need to do apart from be there as an adult. They're completely taken up with what they're doing and they feel like they're really enjoying it.*

²⁰ Transcript notation: 'I' refers to interviewer, 'R' to respondent.

- I. *Can you say when that is most likely to happen?*
- R. *Usually either during a presentation or when they are applying what they have learnt to a practical task.*

During the second interview Teacher A gave an example of how he had used images to represent the geography of the British Isles:

- I. *I introduced this character of 'Blake's Albion', which is like the folk-soul of England. So we had this picture of England and then I drew this big manor house right in the centre, and then I said, 'Right, this is Lord Albion's manor and he's got a nice garden which goes all the way around. He's got a stream flowing through it. Then, if you go up a bit, he's got some workshops, and if you go a bit higher he's got some mines, and over here he's got some fishing boats, and here he's got some orchards.. here he's got some wheat and some pigs to make sausages.' Then they suddenly said, 'Ah, is that London? Is that the M25?' So it very much came out of this one character.*
- I. *Were they really engaged with that?*
- R. *Yes, they really liked to have this juxtaposition of the narrative, and then, a couple of days later, I would have this map. So they could hold both the narrative and the map. They really liked the tension between the two.*
- I. *What other regional geography did you do?*
- R. *We looked at England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and tried to get a feeling of the folk soul of those different countries. Looking at Scotland, why is its emblem the thistle? Is the thistle a bit like a Scottish person.. a bit prickly? But actually they've got this colour and warmth inside.*

This use of images to characterize and personify space resonated with my own portrait of Africa, albeit in a more simplistic form. The importance of transforming knowledge into holistic images, and representing earth as a living organism, arose again in relation to geology:

I gave them a picture of an igneous rock. You could picture it as born out of the earth like a birth process, where the rock comes out of what we could call, 'Mother Earth'. So in that way I alluded to some form of sentience: Mother Earth gives birth to igneous rocks!

The respondent also indicated that the geographical imagination had been interwoven with historical narrative:

I haven't done the geography of Europe properly this year. I covered some geography within my history main lesson, following the journey of certain historical figures in detail, like Alexander.

When discussion moved from the imaginative to the cognitive dimension of learning responses were less certain. Teacher A's approach was clearly embedded in anthroposophy's spiritual understanding of the child and the imaginative dimension of learning:

At this age it's more to do with their process of incarnation. They are really getting into the physical, very much in matter, so it's right for them to form a feeling

relationship to the matter of the earth.

There was, however, a recognition that the pupils' emerging powers of rational thought and judgement necessitates a change in the way knowledge is presented:

I. *What is the greatest challenge teaching this age group?*

R. *I suppose letting go of a more authoritative approach.*

I. *Would you say then that you need to present in a different way now?*

R. *Yes, slightly. I think there now has to be more distance between the presenter and what's presented. The subject needs to stand more on its own. You're bringing it for them to look at rather than them looking at you, but in terms of pictures, I think they're more sophisticated.*

I. *In what way?*

R. *In terms of the concepts they are vehicles for.*

Interviewing Teacher A left the strong impression that he was deeply engaged with the imaginative dimension of Waldorf pedagogy, particularly the need to transform knowledge into pictures. This drew strong parallels with my own approach. The need to present knowledge in a holistic form, including characterizations, was also demonstrated. However, emerging from these exchanges was also a lack of clarity regarding the role of cognitive learning in the Waldorf schema. In this respect these views corroborated what the previous study had shown; that pupils' emerging capacity for reflection and judgement can easily be marginalised by Waldorf pedagogy and teacher authority, although for Teacher A's younger class this would have been less of an issue. Furthermore, the respondent highlighted that adjustments to learning strategy would have to be made to accommodate this.

Teacher B, a respected teacher also in his thirties, had recently taught for four years as a class teacher at a more established Waldorf school. Having completed class 8, however, he had decided to move to the present smaller, more pioneering school, which he described as 'a lot more anarchic, more chaotic, but more creative.' Teacher B, who had also worked on a peripatetic basis in other Steiner schools, was now teaching mainly in the upper school.

During the first interview the respondent described the impact that his own attendance at a Waldorf school had had on his own life and views on teaching. Although when first transferring from a state school, at twelve years old, he'd felt Waldorf was 'completely whacky, with 'everything so slow', he acknowledged that his school experience had left him 'feeling totally recognized and strengthened by the communal ethos and warmth of

the school.. one that created close friendships.'

Like Teacher A, he had also developed an early interest in matters spiritual, indicating that his own education had had a significant impact on this:

I had this feeling for the spiritual that came from somewhere, so I read a lot about religions, and thought, who is this Steiner guy, that guy I used to make fun of? Then at 21 I started to read some anthroposophy.

As the interview progressed it became clear that the respondent had strong, personal views on the Waldorf approach. These had been reinforced by his experiences as a pupil:

There were teachers who were doing a really hopeless job, and it may sound conceited, but I remember sitting in one lesson and thinking, he's doing a really crap job. I'd like to see if I could do any better one day. My geography at school, even in a Steiner school, was mostly listening to the teacher and then copying what he said off the board. It's always a big danger in a Steiner school.

Acknowledging the dangers of a passive, routinized approach to teaching, he stressed that his own method aimed to be more spontaneous, to 'engage with what was living in the classroom, in the interaction between me and the kids.' Although, as a novice teacher, he admitted he had meticulously planned lessons and tightly controlled classroom discourse, he had subsequently learnt to relax his authority and listen to his pupils. This had allowed what he described as a 'magic' to come into the classroom:

It's very difficult to put into words. I think it's about trusting in what you have to bring. That's not out of intellectual knowledge but out of your wisdom, out of what's happening between you and this particular group of children; trusting in that and in them.

Pedagogical freedom from either external, bureaucratic control or rigid Waldorf method were evidently important personal motives. Teacher B was clearly intent on adopting a more intuitive approach. This defined his views on classroom practice and its educational goal:

I. *Is freedom important to you?*

R. *Yes, absolutely! That's why I'm in this job really. I don't think I've been this close to freedom in any other job, because of the creativity and lack of control coming from any authority other than yourself, other than a higher spiritual authority.. your higher self rather than a government or prescribed authority.*

I. *Is teaching therefore about your self-development as much as your pupils'?*

R. *I think the two are linked. The reason I'm teaching in a Steiner school is to work in an environment that is going to help other people enable themselves and to help them realise who they are.. to work with people in a living sense and unlock their potential. Yes, ultimately I achieve a level of freedom and enable the children to achieve that.*

Not surprisingly, the respondent had clear misgivings regarding any regulation of

classroom practice, such as lesson planning or specifying cognitive learning goals. In his opinion this would compromise what he described as the 'inner journey' of the main lesson.

During the second interview, the importance of the image as the foundation for knowledge-building was clearly emphasized:

I. *Have you presented knowledge differently from the way you were taught it at school?*

R. *Yes, I've tried to do it as pictorially as possible, with images, and anecdotally, bringing stories and my own experience of other countries, talking about the food of countries and areas. Yes, as many stories and images as I could conjure up. More through the feeling, I suppose, than the intellect.*

I. *Can you tell me more about engaging the intellect?*

R. *Yes, dealing more with the imagination or what they can sense, rather than just facts and figures, 'though they still need facts and figures. If I didn't engage their feelings they'd start falling asleep. If they're not awake you can feel it in the room. I've had a couple of lessons when I obviously didn't engage the feelings too well and you can feel them thinking through boredom. Even if the subject appears dry, say, plate tectonics in class 6, I felt I had to use some kind of pictorial element. I couldn't say, 'Ok kids, there are these plates under the ground and when they rub together they cause friction.' They would have just fallen asleep. But if we had the kids moving around, pushing the desks together with one going over the other..*

I. *I did a similar thing to introduce my class to the idea of why earthquakes happen. I had them standing on their desks in a line and then pushing from one end. I remember when someone fell off!*

R. *Wow!*

I. *That was one way to make it real!*

R. *Yes, make it visual, and engage the will.*

As the vehicle to engage pupils' feelings, and therefore central to Waldorf pedagogy, images were constructed to characterize and represent, in a holistic sense, the natural region. Furthermore, the imaginative transaction was considered a learning goal in itself:

I. *What skills do you think the pupils learn in geography?*

R. *To give them a sense of the country or the region. To give them a flavour for it, a taste for it, rather than a dry understanding of it. Stories and songs from that country, much more of the quality of that country, rather than just the physical make-up of it and the intellectual side. I pick out the things that characterize that country. I approach it through the people and how they reflect the environment they live in.. the vegetation, the climate and all the rest of it.*

I. *How do you know that your picture is true to that place?*

R. *Yes, I find it quite hard not to be too subjective or not to present a stereotypical image.*

Moreover, geography was presented in a historical context and interwoven with a Eurocentric narrative:

What I did in geography would relate to the context of the whole year. In class 7, when we did journeys of discovery, we looked at how Europeans spread across the

continent and their encounter with the native Indians. So, we had already been there in a historical sense.

However, the respondent also emphasized the importance of pupil involvement in knowledge-building, to broaden the geographical picture:

I. *Is it usually just your picture?*

R. *I'd always ask who's been to that country. Often the lesson would come from them because they would tell me about their experiences, so we'd end up with this picture constructed from different views. It becomes a much more whole picture, especially as you add their pictures to it. It becomes truer, a lot more balanced than just my subjective picture. I try not to just stand there and say how it is.*

I. *Is your presentation the most important part of the lesson?*

R. *There was quite a lot of that because I chose the countries I had been to, so that involves a lot of talking. Also, a lot of project work and quite a lot of map drawing, and imaginative exercises. I'd get them to imagine they were someone from that country. And also drama.. a meeting of peoples from different countries.*

Like the previous respondent, Teacher B's learning strategy was clearly embedded in Waldorf's imaginative schema. Moreover, his views also indicated potentially problematic areas of practice. Resistant to the notion of a predefined teaching method, the respondent stressed that the spirit of the Waldorf approach lay essentially in the social milieu and discourse of the main lesson which, for pupils in this age group, requires an open exchange of ideas. Whilst this may shift the emphasis in the classroom discourse from the teacher to pupils, involving a more collaborative method of knowledge building (rather than the repetitive process of listening and recall), the underlying tension between the epistemological principle of Waldorf pedagogy - knowledge creation grounded in imagery - and the representation generated, remains. On the one hand, as indicated in my theoretical review and emphasized by the respondent, in its emphasis on the imagination the Waldorf approach claims freedom in the learning process. On the other hand, as these responses suggest, knowledge is highly subjective and contextualized, both holistically and historically. Furthermore, the level of pupil intellectual engagement remains uncertain. The respondent's views also drew my attention towards my own lesson schema, particularly the degree of control over learning discourse I had exercised.

Teacher C, an ex-state school teacher also in his thirties, had recently completed a difficult year with class 8. Previously a subject teacher in the same school, and having no class teaching experience or training, he was particularly forthcoming about the challenges involved in this work, describing his role as 'all encompassing and quite overwhelming.' Unlike the other two respondents, having taken on the class late in the

cycle he had not developed a strong bond with his pupils and had felt challenged by their behaviour. He also felt that a lack of support from the school had compounded his problems, which included a degree of tension with the parent body of his class:

You work really, really hard to educate their children and then their parents criticize your teaching practice, saying, 'Why are you doing this? You are wrong! Or blaming you for the misbehaviour of their children.

Like the previous respondent, during the first interview Teacher C recalled how attending a Steiner school had left a deep impression on him:

When I left the school there was a lot missing in general; as a young man going out into the world I found it cold and shallow. Then, when I went to university, I started to look back at my education and thought, 'why was my school so warm?' So, through that reflection I began to read Steiner, but I put it aside for a while. A lot of it I couldn't accept, so first I looked at other ways of discovering spirituality.

Also similar to Teacher B, the principle of being free to interpret the curriculum was a motivating factor for his present work as a Waldorf teacher:

R. *I didn't very much like teaching in state schools.. mostly regurgitating information rather than coming from me and the research I've done on a subject. I was just following a curriculum and telling the children what they had to know. It was quite soul-less really and I could put very little feeling into it. It wasn't coming from me. You're caught up in a kind of factory system.*

I. *How does that compare with teaching here?*

R. *In Steiner schools you have freedom. The curriculum is based on the child and you have to go away and do the research yourself and bring it to the children. So the knowledge comes from us, our interpretation of the subjects which we adapt for the children's understanding.*

Focusing on geography, Teacher C stressed that an important element of this approach was engaging the pupils' feelings:

It's not so much the intellectual information, but the feeling for the subject. All those emotions that I felt twenty years ago, when I was their age, came back to me, and so I build things up with all this research and give them the details. It's essential to get that feeling quality across to them.

Characteristic of the Waldorf method, this 'feeling quality' was associated with imagery:

I. *Do you try to engage the pupils' feelings?*

R. *Yes, completely!*

I. *Through the quality of the image you give them?*

R. *Yes, that's the main point of the lesson. I find the most striking image that I can get across personally, the one that comes from me.*

I. *How do you know the class are engaged with it?*

R. *You don't really know, but you can tell during the lesson to some extent.. their*

listening to you and not chattering, but you don't really know until the following day, when you ask them to recall that image, and whether they can recall it perfectly, well, almost word perfectly, and also put themselves into it.

A brief discussion on the meaning of imagery and its place in geographical discourse then highlighted a potential area of difficulty:

- R. But I really hesitate using the word 'imagination' to teach fourteen year olds.*
- I. So, what's the difference between image and imagination?*
- R. I associate imagination with the realm of fantasy, whereas they really want a concrete, real image, and they will pick up on you and say, 'Is that really true?'*
- I. Can you give an example of when this has happened?*
- R. When we were looking at clouds, I said I'm going to talk to you about the life cycle of a cloud. I said, 'Do you think the cloud is a living being?' And I thought they would pick up on that, but instead they rejected it quite a lot. Once I got onto scientific facts and explained how cloud particles built up to form clouds, then they got into it, but they didn't like talking about fluffy clouds. They weren't interested at all. In class 6 and 7 they would have picked up on that far more, but now they are really interested in facts and figures.*

I asked him whether this meant the imaginative element was problematic, or whether, for this age group, it was still the best vehicle for transmitting knowledge. My intention was to explore Steiner's notion of the "concrete image", as one drawing on detailed description of the world to construct a holistic, imaginative-picture. The respondent drew attention to the idea that facts can also be presented in an imaginative and engaging way:

- R. Certainly with teenagers, facts and feelings are so very closely linked. It's a question of them grasping the idea, or discovering the facts, by imagining the processes happening or observing them in the field.*
- I. Can you give me an example of this from your classroom experience?*
- R. When we got to the discovery of America.. the Conquistadors wandering through the jungle.. I described what that experience must have been like. They asked me lots of questions. They wanted to get the details right. 'What were the monkeys like?' 'What colour were the parrots?' Again, it's such a factual age. They just wanted the facts.*
- I. How did you do this in a way that engaged their feelings?*
- R. I described them places that allude to the senses.. the smells, the sounds, the tastes. They really pick up on that. I read them Columbus's log-book and they were fascinated by his descriptions.*
- I. Is this what you mean by 'concrete images'? Images that are grounded in experience?*
- R. Yes, exactly!*

As with the previous respondents, Teacher C also stressed that pupils needed to be involved in knowledge-building. To achieve this, he acknowledged the need to relax his authority over the learning discourse:

- I. Has the way you teach changed over the past year?*
- R. Now I listen more to what the pupils are asking me. I give them time and space to go away and find the answers themselves.*
- I. So you've become less prescriptive and more open to feedback?*
- R. Yes, but I don't know if that's me or it's the age group as well. I tell them I'm*

interested in their ideas and opinions because the information I'm giving them is old for me, but to them it's fresh and I'm fascinated by their reaction to it. Their imaginations are much freer. That is their genius.

I. *What kind of skills do you think your pupils have learnt?*

R. *Observation and an awareness of the world outside of themselves, outside of the school, beyond the television.. really an awareness of the physical world around us. Having looked at things.. the clouds and rivers.. they pretty much work it out for themselves. I'm surprised by how much they found out for themselves and the detail they want..*

While the respondent clearly indicates his endeavour to work with Waldorf principles, his responses also highlight the challenges involved and how these can be compounded by lack of experience. In particular, Teacher C raises the epistemological issue of how to construct knowledge in a way that is both imaginative and allows for clear definition and intellectual engagement. He refers to this issue in a more direct way than the other respondents. However, although the exact cause of classroom tension is not known, without the experience of following pupils' development over an extended period (from class 1 to 8), it would, one can assume, be more difficult to pitch lessons in a way that suits their intellectual ability, notwithstanding the additional behavioural issues that pupils of this age group present. Even teachers coming towards the end of an eight-year cycle with the same class often struggle at this stage (Woods et al 2005: 72). This suggests that a lack of class teaching experience, added to the specific challenges involved in teaching adolescents, makes it difficult to apply Waldorf principles successfully.

3.3.3 Conclusion

These interviews draw attention towards important areas of Waldorf's holistic practice. Foremost, the responses indicate the personal struggles involved in working with the educational philosophy, one that relies heavily on the subjective process of knowledge transformation and development of method to suit pupils' needs, without a defined conceptual framework or curriculum specification. Whilst the loosely-structured interview data presented here does not lend itself easily to rigorous comparison (this is not the intention of this study), nor does it draw directly on lesson discourse, these interviews clearly suggest that, as a holistic framework for practice, Waldorf philosophy both inspires and challenges.

Firstly, as would be expected, teachers stressed the importance of presenting knowledge

in an imaginative form, as the basis for pupil engagement and the vehicle for learning. Furthermore, this principle of learning was considered a distinctive feature of the Waldorf approach, to both the child's free intellectual development and, from the teacher's position, his or her own creative, pedagogical activity. There was also clear evidence that the worldview presented to pupils was highly contextualized, based, in a deterministic sense, on the natural region and interwoven with historical narrative. In these respects, the conceptual framework for knowledge-building is clearly embedded in anthroposophy's holistic child archetype and view of the world. Translating this schema into a learning discourse, however, depends primarily on the teacher's ability to transform knowledge into images and communicate it verbally. This emerges as an essential requirement of effective classroom practice, as shown in the following section.

Secondly, emerging from these discussions of the philosophy underpinning the Waldorf approach are certain potentially problematic areas of learning strategy, most notably uncertainty regarding the level of intellectual engagement appropriate for this age group (twelve to fourteen). Respondents raised this issue in different ways; by stressing the need for more clearly-defined knowledge, such as factual information or identifying causal relationships, or the need for more active pupil involvement in knowledge building, such as classroom discussion or project work. This highlights an area of ambiguity in the Waldorf schema. Furthermore, it was unclear whether pupils were taught any form of intellectual or conceptual schema to help them interpret the world, such as map-reading skills. However, each respondent acknowledged that the cognitive aspect of learning is an important factor to consider in developing a learning strategy for the pre-adolescent child. It was also noticeable that the worldview teachers presented to their pupils remained unquestioned.

The issues that emerged from these two preliminary studies inspired me to explore further how Waldorf philosophy translates into classroom practice, as both a holistic method to gain understanding of the world, and as a framework for spatial representation. Whilst these interviews emphasize further the challenging and problematic areas of practice highlighted in the study of my own lessons, they also point towards the importance of personal interpretation of the educational philosophy and the subtle differences between teachers' learning strategies. To investigate this in more depth the focus of this empirical study will now move towards Waldorf's narrative method and pupils' in-class learning experiences, with data drawn directly from different classroom

discourses involved in knowledge construction. As shown below, the dynamics of classroom talk provide invaluable insights into both the benefits and the challenges of Waldorf's holistic framework. These could only be explored fully in the lesson context. Since evidence so far has shown that the transformation in the child's intellectual development between the ages of twelve and fourteen is particularly challenging, requiring considerable adjustment to teaching method, the study will remain focused on this age group.

3.4 Exploring Practice: Lesson Observations

3.4.1 Aims, Methodology and Contexts

The intention of this first phase of lesson observations was to explore the classroom discourse involved in knowledge construction.²¹ Given the questions that had emerged from my theoretical review and the first two stages of this study, my aim was to investigate further how Waldorf philosophy informs learning method and geographical representation in the lesson context. This study also gave me the opportunity to explore ways of interpreting complex data and, regarding the study as a whole, identify important aspects of knowledge-building for more in-depth analysis. This study should therefore be viewed as the precursor of the more detailed one that follows, which draws on longer sequences of lessons and more ethnographic detail.

For reasons considered above, it was intended for methodology to remain sensitive to Waldorf's learning method and educational goals. Although observing lessons presents an abundance of visual and verbal impressions to record, my attention was essentially drawn towards the exchanges between teachers and pupils. Without the use of textbooks, worksheets or other media, teachers engage pupils in a knowledge-building process centred wholly on narrative and dialogue (as highlighted in 1.4). Binding teacher, pupils and subject, classroom discourse also reflects the social milieu of the class, providing an insight into the teacher's authority, relationship to the class and, at times, tensions in the learning process. As the medium for knowledge construction, classroom discourse therefore became the focus of data collection. This was mainly recorded by hand in a lesson journal, although longer sequences of dialogue were recorded digitally.

²¹ Lessons observations took place during January and February 2007.

As the main body of hermeneutic data, extensive recorded dialogue presents the problems of both selection and interpretation. Whereas extracts of dialogue from interviews had been chosen primarily on the basis of their significance regarding the intentions of practice, classroom talk, embedded in complex human interactions and meanings, is far more dense and therefore more challenging to deal with.

However, certain sequences of narrative and dialogue emerge that are particularly meaningful, highlighting Waldorf's imaginative pedagogy and holistic forms of representation, and providing a rich body of empirical data through which to explore its philosophical framework. To represent this, and do justice to the Waldorf approach, I attempt to draw on the lived experience of the learning process, or what Nielsen calls the 'imaginative transaction' or 'phenomenological moment' (2003: 14). As such, whilst the spiritual-aesthetic dimension of practice remains elusive, a sense of the intention and deeper meaning of lesson discourse becomes evident. Although focus on the discourse involved in knowledge construction suggests a socio-cultural perspective (in the neo-Vygotskian, linguistic sense that Mercer 1995 analyses it, for example), this was not my intention. Rather, I wanted to draw specifically on the imaginative-pictorial and cognitive thought-forms that classroom talk generated - the primary intention or essence of Waldorf's pedagogical discourse rather than its socio-cultural effects (theoretical perspectives on classroom talk are considered further in 4.0).

Representation of lessons therefore attempts to convey a sense of Waldorf's intentional holistic learning experience, including the way knowledge is built up organically over successive days. For this reason, sequences of discourse are initially presented as they were recorded, with short commentaries that highlight their salient features. Analysis then draws firstly on patterns in the discourse to indicate learning method and aims, followed by a brief discussion of the knowledge-building process, which focuses on both pupil activity and the form of geographical representation. A broader discussion of the philosophical framework underpinning learning discourse then follows in the next section. This is developed further in the next chapter.

In this study a total of twelve lessons were observed in two different schools. School X, where two different classes were observed (classes 6 and 7), is an established school with a developed anthroposophical culture and support structure. Teachers are generally highly experienced and class completion rates above average. School Y, the same school

attended in the previous studies, is less established and has a higher turnover of staff. One class was observed here (class 7). School context, however, does not necessarily imply different standards of class teaching.

As with the previous respondents, the teachers observed had different levels of experience. Both teachers at School X were in their second cycle and had been with their classes since class 1. The teacher at School Y was in his first placement, having taking over the class in class 3. As noted above, it is assumed that class teaching experience does have a bearing on how subject knowledge and pupils are handled, and should therefore be taken into consideration. Regarding sampling method, the three case studies were chosen purely on the basis of invitations from teachers to observe their lessons. The age groups taught also suited the focus of this research. More details on teachers are given below.²²

3.4.2 Respondents, Lesson Content and Analyses

Teacher A, a class 6 teacher at School X, had been involved with anthroposophical therapeutic communities before becoming a class teacher. With no formal education in geography beyond secondary level, she described herself as a ‘geographer by passion rather than intellect’. A rural up-bringing had nurtured her strong interest in landscape and physical geography. Teacher A had been with her class since its inception and now had twenty-two pupils, aged between eleven and twelve.²³

In this study I observed six successive lessons of a three-week main lesson block on Europe. The teacher told me her intention was to develop, in an historical context, the image of Europe as the ‘cradle of opportunity’, by following the journey of the ancient nomadic tribes. In this way she said geography would be kept ‘close to human experience.’ She also stressed that her pupils needed to learn geographical skills and ‘be active in a process of discovery’, indicating that geography had to be ‘more than just a story.’

As is typical of Waldorf classrooms, pupils were seated separately in rows of wooden

²² A more rigorous sampling method is used in the study that follows.

²³ More biographical details regarding this teacher are given in the following chapter.

desks facing the teacher and blackboard. Notable for the absence of formal aids to learning, such as textbooks, wall-charts or computers, the room felt homely, painted in a lazare and with displays of pupils' artwork. The only indication of the theme of the lesson was a map of Europe next to the blackboard. All the classrooms attended in the study were of a similar layout and décor.

The class atmosphere suggested a strong bond between teacher and pupils. The teacher was clearly respected by her class and controlled lessons with a relaxed authority. Although pupils chatted quietly whilst doing bookwork, presentations were not interrupted and the class was easily reined in when necessary. Through a combination of energetic pace with regular pauses, a strong voice, and engaging narrative and tasks, the class's attention was generally well held for each two-hour lesson. For the most part, and in keeping with Waldorf tradition, the teacher addressed the whole class from the front of the room, keeping a close control over the ensuing exchanges.

As in normal main lesson practice, the first half hour of each lesson began with a sequence of rituals and a rhythmic activity, in the following order:

- pupils enter class and work quietly in main lesson books or on a set task
- register
- verse (whole class)
- daily verses (individual)
- poem, song or recorders (whole class)

The lesson then focused on the main lesson theme. The sequences presented below are drawn mainly from the teacher's presentation to the whole class. Attention will focus on lesson structure and the related learning method (numbers in brackets are used to help indicate this), particularly the way images and more cognitively-engaging sequences of discourse are combined to build knowledge. To add contextual detail and aid analysis, the following system of notation is used. Specific extracts of classroom talk are referred to in my analysis by citing lesson number first, followed by the sequence of discourse indicated in the transcript (e.g 2/3). It should be noted that lesson 1 was a relatively short lesson interrupted by assembly and is therefore not considered in detail.

Table 1: Transcription Notation²⁴

T	Teacher
P	Pupil
PA	Identified pupil
PP	Several pupils
A, B, C	Pupils named
//	Pause of more than 3 seconds
Bold text	Words given particular emphasis
[text in square brackets]	Explanation, contextual information or description of activities
(number in brackets)	To reference lesson activities and extracts of discourse

The first lesson began with the teacher eliciting a number of geographical concepts (e.g. ‘terrain’, ‘climate’, ‘relief’, ‘contour’), followed by a general description of the physical geography of Europe. Pupils were then asked to apply these concepts and ‘*make statements*’ to describe a country of their choice using an atlas. The lesson concluded with pupils drawing an outline map of Europe. During the lesson a list of geographical terms was recorded on the blackboard.

Lesson 2 began with a brief question and answer sequence to clarify the previous day’s concepts. A selection of pupils then read out their written work. One pupil described Majorca (1). This prompted the teacher to talk about the landscape.

T [Standing in front of class] *That little place.. I went up there.. up a winding road towards a hill that stuck out like a pimple.. up and up ‘til you get to a monastery at the top. It’s the most stunning place! You can see all around; north, south, east and west. For a thousand years the monks have been tucked away. They used to teach the farmers and support the agriculture. It’s a wonderful strategic spot. All around Europe you find remote monasteries like that perched on cliffs in lovely, remote places.* (2)

The next pupil described an area of France. The teacher then instructed the class to find Carmague in their atlases.

T *Who likes horses? [Pointing to wall map] This area of France is swampy and full of lakes. If you go in the morning you’ll see a swampy area that goes right out to the sea with the mist hovering. Then you may hear a squelchy noise and see the white horses coming into the swampy marsh. Everywhere you can find unique, special things!* (2)

This was followed by the main presentation.

T *I want us to go on a journey. // The migrations of a people caused a great disturbance, known as the ‘scourge of God’. They came from the north-east side of the Siberian Plateau and their lifestyle was dictated by the climate and their influence spread from the Himalayas to Alaska. In this country we had no idea of the immensity of the continent. These people were known as the ‘Huns’. They were ancient, hardy and robust and could endure most conditions. Life was hard and they were ruthless,*

²⁴ Adapted from Alexander (2001).

casting out the old and young if they were weak. Even grandmother could be thrown out! Up in the arctic circle light was harsh, an incredible glare in the winter that made you want to close your eyes.. no nettled sunbeams.. no scrub, no shadows and few mountains. Light was harsh and undiluted. So only the strong survived. Of course, it helped if you were short and stocky, like me and perhaps a little fat! [laughter] So, people were sensitive to the climate and were nomadic, moving to find food for their horses. In fact, they were married to their horses.. their speed, height, warmth, strength.. they even wore trousers to ride them and they even ate them.. sitting on the meat to make it tender! [groans] They moved west to the Siberian Plains, burning everything behind them, feared because they were stocky, had yellow skin, thick hair and almond eyes.. a genetic code that has stayed to this day in Asian looks. (2)

Following the presentation, the lesson focused on map work. The teacher briefly explained how to draw an accurate map using lines of latitude and longitude. Pupils then re-drew their maps of Europe using a grid. (3)

On the following day (lesson 3), pupils were asked randomly to recall the teacher's description of the Huns, based on the question format of 'who', 'what', 'why' and 'where'. (1) The teacher then continued her description of the tribes, focusing on their close relationship to nature.

T You remember a lot by the quality of your questions. If you think more about how the environment affects physiology.. it's the same with the Eskimos and the Nepalese. If the Nepalese didn't climb mountains then their features might change. Imagine yourself there [points to the Siberian Plains] and that you know nothing.. no maps.. what would give you a sense of direction? How would you decide which way to go?.. You'd be pulled by the sun! They didn't know the earth went around the sun, they just looked to the east and saw the sun rise, and in the west it disappeared. They went where the sun rose, and then because of the wall they went west and it became warmer, and they found more grass and food and their diet changed. This was all discovery without guide-books! They relied on their tongues, eyes and ears as they travelled. (2)

The class were then instructed to write a 'descriptive but realistic' account of the tribe's migration using the previous question format as a guide. (3) Following this exercise, the teacher asked pupils to find the Volga River in their atlases.

T Now we've crossed the Ural mountains, we're going down to the source of the Volga. Find the Volga River [teacher gives grid reference]. Who's got this lovely lake? Imagine where we are. Imagine you're a Hun and you've come from the east. What do you see? Give me one fact about it.

P It's flat and green!

T Yes, and so we've decided to stay here for fifty years. Why's that? Tell me more about the terrain and climate. Look at its position, nestled between the Ural and Volga heights, this lovely, green lowland! Now go west, where do you come to eventually?

P Us!

T Yes, Great Britain! That good old green and pleasant land! Lovely, compared to the Siberian Plateau! Now look at the map again. Where does the Volga go? Yes, down to the Caspian Depression. See, the river's meandering and spreading out. That's a delta. Would they stay here in this swampy depression or cross the river? Let's leave them now, here in the Ukraine. (4)

For the remainder of the lesson the class worked on their maps, completing their grids and drawing on the main rivers of Europe. (5)

On the following day (lesson 4) the teacher asked the class to describe (orally) the landscapes traversed by the tribes, stressing the use of appropriate adjectives. Her presentation then told the story of Atilla. For the remainder of the lesson pupils read out their previous day's written work and drew the mountain ranges onto their maps.

After recounting Atilla's life (pupils were asked to stand in a line to represent the order of events) (1), lesson 5's presentation focused on Hungary, where Atilla's life ends. To focus attention, the class were asked to look at Hungary in the atlas with their hands covering their brows, and count to twenty-five. This was followed by a short question and answer sequence.

T *What's it like? What can you see? //*

P *A big, flat plain! Can't see any mountains.*

P *Hot in the summer, cold in the winter!*

P *It's a flat plain surrounded by mountains.*

T *Entirely surrounded?// No, there are some weak spots! It has gaps in the mountains where the Danube flows. Without the Danube there's no Hungarian Plain. What do I mean?*

P *The river's seeking the lowest land.*

T [pointing to the course of Danube on wall map] *Here it worms its way through the mountain pass.. a very important, beautiful river, fed by Alpine rivers and snow melt. What do you call those rivers?*

P *Tributaries.*

T *Everyone say it: 'Tributaries!'*

PP *Tributaries!*

T *So, it collects this melted snow and breaks its banks, pouring water and silt onto the plain.. a lovely lot of topsoil that makes the land fertile, so the people could settle. They grew fruit and crops and built villages with barns, turkeys, pigs and cows.. villages and land! We only have three farms here now [in the school vicinity]. In this beautiful basin almost circled by mountains they settled and grew food for many people in Europe. From the Black Forest to the Black Sea. I like that! (2)*

For the remainder of the lesson pupils drew the course of the Danube on their maps and wrote a descriptive account of Atilla's life. (3)

The following lesson (lesson 6) completed the portrait of Hungary. After working in pairs to recall and record 'factual statements' about the region (1), the teacher described the landscape in more detail, with some moments evoking a strong sense of place.

T *If you go into the Danube and lie on the water, it's very floaty.. and it's got shallows where you can fish. You can eat hearty goulash and beans with bread dough dropped in. It doesn't have a coast. It's landlocked [writes term on the blackboard]. It's a unique place! On the plains it's always dusty.. the silt becomes dry and then it's whipped up. It's hard to breathe and it stings you. Then when it rains the sand becomes a cloying dampness.. a kind of dusty fog with sand suspended. Many people have never seen the sea in Hungary.. never even swum in the waves! (2)*

Pupils were then instructed to write a descriptive account of Hungary, based on 'real observation, as if you were there'. A selection of these were read aloud and geographical

concepts elicited (for example, 'border', 'floodplain' and 'rural'). (3)

Analysis

The salient feature of these lessons is the teacher's skilful use and control of narrative to engage pupils in a direct, communicative method of knowledge-building. This process has a general pattern that follows, with some variation, Waldorf's archetypal lesson structure and rhythmic method of learning, using a typical sequence of teacher-pupil exchanges. As shown in 1.4, these are question and answering (recall), narrating and listening (presentation), and giving instructions (application). Using this format, and relying heavily on the creation of pictorial images, the teacher builds up a holistic image of Europe. Although the cognitive pace is generally slow, the lessons are striking for both their repetitive format and the way pupils are held by the narrative. However, in this respect the teacher's strong authority and close relationship is clearly evident.

Underlying the patterns of discourse and lesson structure are more subtle movements and meanings within the learning discourse. Most noticeable is the way knowledge is developed through sequences of descriptive, empirically-based narrative, evoking vivid, synthetic images of people and place (e.g. sequences 2/2 and 6/2), although, at certain moments these are more powerful and engaging. During these sequences the transaction of knowledge relies primarily on listening to the spoken word, and, in this sense, is developed intuitively and organically without intellectual schemata. Moreover, given that these descriptive sequences are embedded in the main narrative, as well as being developed on a daily basis, they create a general picture from which more clearly defined ideas can be elicited. In this respect, and as Steiner intended, concepts emerge from, or are applied in direct relation to, the pictorial content, and are therefore capable of growth.

The most distinctive feature of Teacher A's approach, however, is the rigour with which she develops and applies a conceptual framework to the pictorial content, giving knowledge a clearer, more objective definition and engaging pupils in a more rational mode of thinking. This involves questioning and is done in a number of ways: by eliciting, defining and applying geographical concepts (e.g. lesson 2); instructing pupils to make 'statements' (6/1); map-reading (3/4, 5/2) and drawing, and descriptive writing (3/3). Simple causal relations are also implicit in the teacher's synthetic portraits of nature and people. By constantly drawing on the sphere of imaginative-pictures knowledge therefore remains concrete rather than abstract. In two short sequences (3/4

and 5/2) atlases are also used as an empirical resource to construct concrete pictorial images and engage pupils in thinking clearly about the landscape. Question and answer dialogue, rather than listening to the teacher's narrative, is used to guide such thinking.

As expected, the geographical picture constructed is holistic, and, for the most part, is embedded in historical narrative. In this sense the geographical imagination draws heavily on the notion of the synthetic natural region, portraying indigenous peoples in close relation to nature and, in places, uses stereotypes to characterize races. However, this holistic representation has imaginative power, grounding geography in the human experience of nature, developed as a story or journey. Although strongly tied to anthroposophy's non-dualistic worldview and, in its historical context, the class 6 year theme (the Romans), learning discourse at times moves beyond this framework and is purely geographical (e.g. 5/2, 6/2).

In conclusion, whilst these lessons highlight both the simplicity and pedagogical strengths of Waldorf's narrative method of knowledge-building, they also show the importance of the teacher's own interpretive schema, pointing towards the flexibility of the Waldorf schema. Foremost, and a skill not to be underestimated, is the teacher's versatile use of narrative, through which a learning discourse is developed that engages pupils in different modes of thinking. Adopting the threefold method, although with some personal adjustment, Teacher A engages the intellect through the imagination whilst withholding from abstract conceptualization. In this sense learning discourse draws on both the soul-aesthetic and cognitive realms. Furthermore, the level of pupil engagement and responses suggests this form of learning is effective. However, whilst the imaginative element of the narrative succeeds as a method of knowledge transaction, from a wider view the subjectivity, tight control and repetitive nature of the learning discourse raises important questions regarding the worldview constructed and consolidated. Moreover, the impression was that tensions would emerge in classes of older pupils unless they were involved more freely in the discursive process. Since the focus of the remaining case studies moves towards class 7, this issue of participation will be considered further.

Teacher B, a class 7 teacher at the same school, was in her second cycle of class teaching and also Chair of College. Her present class had recently absorbed a parallel class and grown to thirty-eight pupils. I observed a sequence of three lessons midway through a

geography block on Africa and the Americas. Reviewing the lessons so far, Teacher B told me she had based her presentation on the explorers, following patterns of colonization and exploitation of mineral wealth. Indigenous people had been portrayed in close relation to the natural environment. As would be expected, she expressed caution regarding the intellectual content of her lessons, stressing that 'too much makes the children sick.' Like Teacher A, she also indicated that learning should be a 'process of 'discovery', which she likened to 'planting the seeds of imagination.' To achieve this she said the quality of her presentations was crucial.

The bond between teacher and class was less apparent in this class.²⁵ Pupils were generally more vocal and difficult to engage, requiring more effort to control. Although this also reflects the age of the pupils, my first impression was that it would be difficult to maintain the same degree of control over learning discourse as the previous younger class. Following Waldorf tradition the teacher relied solely on descriptive narrative to build up a portrait of people and places; a wall map and an atlas were the only visual aids. However, as the following vignettes indicate, compared to the previous respondent, within this schema there were differences in the way knowledge was constructed.

Each lesson began with the following sequence of activities:

- register
- verse (whole class)
- African song or recorders (whole class)
- individual verses
- short arithmetic or movement exercise

Attention then turned to the main lesson theme. As before, my analysis focuses on the way the teacher engages pupils in knowledge-building and the geographical picture constructed. The most telling exchanges were during the presentation section, which lasted approximately thirty minutes in each lesson.

Lesson 1 began with a review of Africa, followed by an introduction to the next topic: the Americas.

T [Standing in front of class] *We tied up Africa yesterday. Give me one word to round it off.*
P *Conflict!*

²⁵ This would be expected given that the two classes had recently been merged.

- P *Slavery!*
 T *What did they lose in their education?*
 P *Culture and stories.*
 T *Remember they had a strong sense of the group. What does that mean? Remember the significance of the 'drum.' //* [no response]
They didn't have the same sense of independence as us. They lost the drum! What was it that travelled with them as slaves?
 P *Jazz!*
 T *Yes! This formed the basis of modern American music. (1)*

The teacher then elicited statements on 'what happened around the time of slavery', listing pupils' responses on the blackboard. From these she constructed an introduction to a writing exercise entitled 'Colonization' (2). This was followed by an introductory presentation on the Americas:

- T [Standing next to a large wall map] *Look at this map of the Americas. See how the continent stretches down from the polar regions. Look at these regions.. they'll be the future geography once all the ice has gone! See here the pathway of the first Asians. They crossed the bridge into Alaska thousands of years ago and then travelled down into Canada to look for a warm climate. Then further down we have the U.S. You can see how the continent thins towards Mexico. I'm struck by one thing looking at South America. What is it?*
 P *It could have been joined to Africa.*
 T *Yes! It's quite easy to imagine that. //*
Now look at this beautiful purple ridge. What do you think it is?
 P *The Andes.*
 T *Yes! Now I've taken you through this journey of the continent I want you to look at the landform. Find the equator. Imagine what it's like to live there. What water source serves the great forest?*
 P *The Amazon.*
 T *Yes, and do you notice any connection between the north and the south? How do you think the land was built? //* *Think about the mountain ranges. One range of relatively new mountains and one range that is ancient. Why is that? This is really a picture of the land's biography. Think back to geology and speculate about where the earth might be moving and we'll talk about it tomorrow. There is every possible climate there.. in one continent! (3)*

For the remainder of the lesson the teacher dictated the introduction to the writing exercise and instructed pupils to complete their accounts using the elicited statements. (4)

Commentary

Compared to the previous respondent it is noticeable how Teacher B incorporates question and answer exchanges into her presentation. Through this discourse the elicitation of simple causal relationships (from empirically-based, descriptive narrative) becomes an integral, cognitive element of the knowledge-building process.²⁶ This method is used more intensively in the following two lessons.

²⁶ Empirical in the sense that information is drawn from the atlases, as visual information.

On the following day (Lesson 2) the lesson began with recall of the previous day's content.

T *What do you remember from our first step into the continent? What did we observe?*

P *There were mountains on the left side.*

T *We should use directions. Maps are orientated north to the top and west to the left, so we saw high mountains on the west side. What else did we see?*

P *We saw rivers near the equator; an area of green.*

PA *It gets warmer as you go south and the continent stretches.*

T *Tell me more about the climate in the north. Describe it.*

P *It's icy 'cos it's a polar region.*

PB *There are old and new mountains.*

T *Why are they different?*

PB *The old ones' have been eroded.*

PA *Does that mean the Himalayas are new then?*

T *That depends on the rocks and geological history. There are many factors at work. What else did we observe?*

P *South America is a similar shape to Africa.*

T *Yes, that's right! They were once a part of the same continent called 'Pangea'. Can you see any signs that the land has changed? Look at the light shade of blue near the coast. You can see the shadow of the land beneath the sea. The sea must have risen.*

PC *What happens when the earth moves under the sea?*

P *Is it like when you break something brittle in the bath?*

PC *When did you do that? [laughter]*

T *Well, remember the tsunami. Sometimes the earth can move under the sea, but it's hardly perceptible to us. We can hardly imagine a heat strong enough to melt rock or a force strong enough to move it.*

PC *Why are they called 'Iceland' and 'Greenland'? Shouldn't it be the other way around? //*

[no response] (1)

Following recall, pupils were told to finish the writing exercise they began on the previous day and then draw an outline map of the Americas (2). The teacher then developed her picture of the northern regions and the people:

T [Presenting to whole class] *Look at this large map of North America. You can get an impression of the land from the colours.. purple for mountains and yellower as you get lower. Look at the bowl-like shape of the mountains, enclosing a central part much lower. The earth has shifted and changed. The ice was once a lot further down.. a great sheet of thick ice that once covered Canada. What happens when ice moves?*

P *It carves the land.*

T *Yes, the earth moved up and was carved by ice. Look up here, what pole is this?*

P *The Arctic.*

T *Yes. Why is it so cold here? Think about the angle of the sun's rays.. the further away from the equator the lower the sun's rays. The sun has a strong impact on the landscape. Imagine all that ice in a cold, bare region. This is called tundra and it affects the people who live there. Food and warmth is a problem, and what happens to us when it's cold? .. yes, movement is harder. So, man adapts to his environment. We'll look at this.*

PD [Shouting out] *Eskimos and igloos!*

T *Yes! We see snow here and we think how wonderful! But people have to live here.*

PD *But wouldn't Eskimos find it difficult if they came to a warm climate? //*

- [no response]
- T *Tundra ice.. that's interesting! It's frozen all year round, apart from the summer when the surface thaws, but there's permafrost below.. so cold and dense that the slush stays on the top. How do people manage that?*
- PC [Shouting out] *Why's it called Greenland?*
- [no response]
- T *They have to wear two layers of skin.. one pointed out and the other in. The fur traps the warmth. Imagine how heavy that would be!*
- PD *What happens if you're a vegetarian?*
- PC *Why do people bother living there?*
- T *Yes, why?*
- P *Because they're used to the environment.*
- PE *It might not have been like that once. They've adapted to change.*
- T *What might be the benefits of living here?*
- PE *It's a perfect place for a group of people to live the way they want to! (3)*

Commentary

These exchanges highlight the challenges that arise if less stringent controls are placed on the discourse, with pupils encouraged to contribute freely. Although, at times, the teacher steers away from pupils' (occasionally random) questions and it appears that the momentum of the dialogue might break down, this was skilfully avoided. A more collaborative and spontaneous process of knowledge-building is attempted.

During the following lesson (lesson 3), after asking the class to describe the northern region (1), the teacher attempted to write an introduction to the Americas:

- T *Let's try and compose a few sentences for an introduction to the whole. How might we start? What would be a key word into this subject that would interest someone reading? Discuss this with your partners for two minutes [writes title on blackboard]. There are many ways to enter this subject with our language. What's the best way in?*
//
- P *The only place in the world you can find different climates.*
- P *Stretching of the spine!*
- P *Once upon a time people came from Europe to the land of the Americas.*
- PF *North and South America are one of the largest areas of land on the planet.*
- T *That's perfect! [begins writing this on the blackboard]*
- P *But there are only a few continents!*
- P *I think a story is better.*
- PF *But it's not a story!*
- T *Perhaps it is in a way.*
[continues writing: 'Thousands of years ago human beings made their way from Asia across what we know today as the Bering Straits, to the northern part of this great continent, which spans the distance between the two poles in the Arctic and Antarctic..']
- P *'Between the polar regions' sounds better. (2)*

After completing the introduction the teacher began her presentation.

- T [Holding up a large atlas] *Look at these Arctic regions in your atlas. Let's consider what it's like here. When the icy wind begins to blow the air is very dry and sweeps the surface snow up into the air and it swirls around. Imagine how difficult it is to see in these blizzards! It's not wet snow like we have. Why's it so dry?*
- P *It's not warm enough for snow to evaporate.*
- T *Yes. The air is so cold it can't draw surface water off the earth. How do the people collect water then?*
- P *Do they melt snow?*
- T *Yes, sometimes, but like the Romans used pipes to collect water, here the pipes run overground and are insulated. Why is that? // Because they would freeze!*
- P *How do they collect water? Isn't the sea frozen?*
[no response]
- T *Things we take for granted they have to think about. Now look in your atlases and find Greenland. The Inuits live there. How do you think they travel?*
- P *Wearing big shoes.*
- T *Yes, by walking in the snow. It's very exhausting.. a bit like walking in dry sand, so they've devised methods to move about.. special shoes and sledges. They've adapted to the environment like the pygmies, building igloos out of blocks of ice to keep warm when they go hunting. Why is it warm in an igloo? // It protects you from the wind and the snow becomes like a duvet.. a survival technique if you're lost in the snow.*
- P *Wouldn't it melt if they lit a fire in it?*
- P *The ice is very hard and doesn't melt.*
- T *To see this glowing lantern of an igloo in the distance .. home at last! They had a problem when they started to build modern homes.. the heating melted the ground ice and they started to subside. So what did they do?*
- P *They built on stilts!*
- T *And the animals, think about how they adapt too. The polar bears and their huge paws, like snow-shoes that can spread its weight.. long, waterproof fur that covers the sole and stops it from skidding. Can you think of other animals living there?*
- PP [shouting out] *Seals! Whales! Dolphins!*
- T *Think about their shape.*
- P *Flexible.*
- T *Rounded and blubbery for insulation. Picture the musk oxen huddled together with the water vapour gathering in a little cloud above them.. quite extraordinary! (3)*

For the remainder of the lesson pupils worked on their introduction to the Americas. (4)

Analysis

Although difficult to represent the pace and vigour of classroom discourse, the salient feature of these lessons are the exchanges between teacher and pupils. Whereas Teacher A relies primarily on uninterrupted passages of descriptive narrative and occasional flights of imagination, and hence longer periods of listening, Teacher B questions her class continually. Whilst lessons follow Waldorf's archetypal threefold structure, within this schema the teacher focuses more on pupils' cognitive engagement in knowledge-building, constructing knowledge through an integrated process of presentation (of new material) and reflection. However, as would be expected, this is not based on a predetermined intellectual schema but, in a more spontaneous way, is elicited from

descriptive cameos and close attention to the visual data (the wall-map and atlases). Punctuated with vivid images (for example, of blizzards, igloos and oxen in 3/3), the teacher uses her narrative primarily as a tool to describe and build up a portrait of natural phenomena, implicit in which is the notion of simple causal relationships. Pupil responses and the consistency of their questioning is clear evidence of engagement. As a means to inspire thinking a little narrative goes a long way; this involves an economy of method.

Regarding representation, although focus on slavery and colonization shifts the narrative from the self-contained, synthetic framework of the natural region to a discourse more emotive and political, for the most part indigenous peoples are portrayed in a deterministic and stereotypical way, as adapted to nature.²⁷ Moreover, whilst the narratives observed here is not embedded in stories of colonial adventures, they still evoke romantic images of a pre-technological past. Nevertheless, although representation is clearly positioned, as a portrayal of the exotic “other”, this does not imply that it is not, at times, contested by pupils (e.g. 3/2). This is a tension explored further in the following chapter.

In conclusion, as with the previous example, Teacher B also adopts her own strategy to integrate imaginative and rational learning discourses; one that builds on both descriptive, narrative portraits of people and places and reflection. Unlike Teacher A, however, she withholds from implementing a rigorous conceptual framework to structure ideas, preferring instead to stimulate thinking by intensive questioning. This allows pupils to respond intuitively. In the Waldorf schema this approach draws more on the reflective, egoic-rational dimension of thinking, relying less on the sleep process and more on the here and now of day-time consciousness. However, as in the previous case study, ideas are still embedded in detailed description of the world, or “concrete images”, rather than abstract intellectual schemata.

Furthermore, although knowledge-building is more collaborative and aspires to a standard of objectivity or rationality (for example, by drawing on the epistemological framework of cause and effect), the geographical imagination still retains its distinctive holistic form and, to some extent, its imaginative impact. Pupils’ emerging powers of comprehension are clearly exercised and engagement is sustained throughout the lessons. This brief study provides further evidence of the way Waldorf pupils are led to understanding and the

²⁷ The teacher indicated that the decision to cover slavery was based on pupils’ own interests.

worldview constructed. As with the previous study, it also highlights both the challenges and potential problems of working with Waldorf's holistic philosophy. These emerge in a more explicit form in the final study in this exploratory sequence.

Teacher C, a young class 7 teacher (at School Y) in his first cycle of class teaching, had been with his class for four years and now had fifteen pupils. Although, during our discussion prior to observing lessons, he had expressed a clear motivation and knowledge of Waldorf principles, he acknowledged that, in practice, his relationship to the class had presented problems. In this respect he highlighted the need to relax his authority:

My biggest problem is to become more open to what comes back at me from the class, to actually really listen to it and to judge whether it is something I need to talk about further, or whether to dismiss it as a distraction.

He admitted this aspect of his teaching had caused considerable tension with a section of the parent body.

I observed a sequence of three lessons at the beginning of a geography block on the Americas. In our preview Teacher C outlined his plan to base his presentation on the journeys of key historical figures (Cortes, Pizarro and Humboldt) and portraits of indigenous peoples (the Aztecs, Sioux Indians and Inuits). He stressed that the aim of the first three lessons was to present a picture of the whole continent, drawing on the preceding history main lesson to develop an image of the Americas as the 'source of European wealth.'

On first impressions the class atmosphere felt more subdued than the other classes; classroom discourse was noticeable for its lack of fluency and minimal dialogue with pupils. Since learning discourse was generally less vibrant and interactive, fewer extracts have been selected. However, these lessons still add to an understanding of the Waldorf schema.

As with the other classes lessons began with the following sequence of short activities, although these took considerably more time:

- register
- verse

- singing or recorders (whole class)
- poem recital (whole class)
- short arithmetic exercise or spelling test

The remainder of each lesson then focused on the main lesson theme. As before, attention will focus on pupil engagement in knowledge-building and the representation or worldview constructed.

Drawing on the previous history block, Lesson 1 began by recounting the European motives to explore the Americas (1). This led to a brief introductory presentation on the physical geography of the whole continent.

T [Standing at the front of classroom next to a large globe] *Our main lesson on astronomy looked out from the earth to space. This main lesson begins with the opposite.. looking in at the earth from the outside. We are like fleas on the back of a giant dog! Although we can't see the dog we need to remove ourselves from where we live and look at the whole picture. [Pointing to the globe] Viewed from space we would see whiteness at the ends of the earth, and sea and land. It's the sea that shapes the land. Look at the form of the land and its distinctive shapes formed by water.. large, individual land masses. Look at this huge land mass here that's separated from the others. The only land mass near it is the eastern tip of Asia. Two landmasses joined by a thin strip of land. See how it stretches from north to south. It's unique in many ways! Here, in the northernmost area, it's mostly barren and the people live on meat. Further south it becomes thick coniferous forest and then grassland. Do you know grassland covers a quarter of the earth's surface? You need to live differently in these areas. Then further south it becomes desert and finally hot, tropical forest. You see there are great contrasts with the polar regions. These two continents are cut out of the cake of the earth. Nowhere else can you find that. We're going to explore this continent through the story of two soldiers. One who went west and the other who went south. After Columbus, what did they see through their consciousness? (2)*

For the remainder of the lesson pupils copied an outline map of the Americas copied from the blackboard. (3)

On the following day (lesson 2) the main lesson topic continued with a brainstorming session.

T [Standing at blackboard] *Tell me what you know about the continent I talked about yesterday.*

P *It's a big place with lots of money. An economic empire and a military force.*

P *It's got hot bits and cold bits. Two lumps with a bit in-between.*

PA *Politically free, but full of lies and deceit!*

P *The safest roads are in New Jersey!*

P *Big buildings, big cars, big people!*

PA *It always feels the need to expand.*

P *It has jungles, deserts and islands and cities.. all the places we want to live!*

T *We call these 'environments'.*

- P *It has an uneven spread of money.*
 T *Do you know anywhere else like that?*
 PA *Here!*
 T *Anything else?*
 P *Blame and paranoia.*
 P *War crimes! (1)*

This was followed by a presentation on Cortes' mission to Mexico (2). The lesson concluded with a period of silent work, with pupils completing their title pages. (3)

Although the previous day's presentation had been largely historical, during lesson 3 there was an attempt to draw on the geographical aspect of Cortes' journey. The lesson began with recall of the sequence of events.

- T *What did Cortes do? Where did he go? Give me some names.*
 PP [Shouting out] *Mexico! Hispaniola! Spain! Tabasco River! Mexico City!*
 T [Recording places on blackboard] *What events link these places? Let's narrate this place. Start with the words, 'Cortes was..'*
 P *'Cortes was from Spain and he went to Mexico.'*
 P *Did he go on holiday?*
 [no response] (1)

Rather than continue with this task the teacher assembled some desks and called the class together to look at a large map of the world.

- T [Standing next to desk with pupils, looking down at the open atlas] *On the blackboard are names of places. However, we need to know where they all are; how they relate to each other spatially. Here is a world map, see, and here is Spain. The Iberian Peninsula dominated world exploration. Over here is North and South America. Mexico forms the wider part of the bit in-between. Think of North America as the head, Mexico as the chin.. the lower neck here is Panama, and then down to the shoulders here. //*
Let's take a closer look at Mexico. Cortes lived on the island of Hispaniola and his first military task was to conquer Cuba, where he lived for some years here in Santiago. Well, driven by the challenge to find gold he sailed up the Tabasco River to Mexico City. See, this is a relief map showing height. Mexico City is in a cup of mountains within a long chain called the Andes. This dotted line is the Tropic of Cancer. These areas are dry with lots of desert. The Aztecs lived here.
 P *Are the high points blue?*
 T *Yes.*
 P *It rained a lot when I went there.*
 P *It's volcanic too! (2)*

At this point a pupil pointed at a picture of a penis drawn on the desk. Given the ensuing disruption the lesson was ended abruptly.

Analysis

As with the previous studies, Teacher C adopts the threefold method of recall, presentation and application (as indicated numerically), relying solely on narrative to build knowledge through description. However, whilst Teacher C's presentation is, at

certain moments, vivid in pictorial imagery (with effective use of metaphors e.g. ‘cake’, ‘dog’, ‘head’ etc., for example), these sequences are largely monologic. Without the ongoing dialogical exchange of question and answer pupils are therefore not as actively engaged in knowledge-building as the previous classes. For this reason, although the class are briefly held by the narrative, as the potential basis for a more cognitively-engaging learning discourse it represents a missed opportunity.

Regarding representation, whilst Teacher C begins typically with an overview of the physical form of the whole continent, alluding to human adaptation (1/2), the geographical picture subsequently becomes the scene for Cortes’s imperialist mission (2/2 and 3/2). Furthermore, on the occasion that pupils voice their views and opinions (2/1), dialogue suggests that more focus on a geography of the present would have had greater appeal.

In conclusion, Teacher’s C’s tight control of classroom discourse highlights the potential problem of the epistemological framework underpinning Waldorf’s narrative-based pedagogy. Relying heavily on the subjective process of transforming knowledge into an imaginative form, whilst the learning discourse, at times, achieves its pedagogical aim as an imaginative transaction, as a representation it remains highly contextualized and one-sided. Moreover, by withholding from questioning and reflective dialogue with the class, the geographical picture becomes narrowly defined or, as this example shows, embedded in a crude form of natural determinism. Without the intellectual engagement stimulated by such exchanges, the learning experience remains primarily aesthetic and one-dimensional. The epistemological issues raised by these three sequences of class observation will now be considered further.

3.5 Conclusion and Discussion

As considered in the previous chapters, two principles embedded in anthroposophy’s worldview are fundamental to the Waldorf approach to geography. Firstly, the general pedagogical notion that the child is educated freely by engaging the intellect through the imagination or feeling life, in so doing nurturing mobility in thinking, or what Steiner called a “living intellect” (1.3). Secondly, and intrinsic to geography, a holistic worldview or spatial representation (chapter 2). These short studies, including the participant observation and interviews, have provided a range of data to illustrate how

these key principles guide classroom practice in an age-specific context. Although difficult to capture the classroom experience and social dimension of Waldorf's communicative method, as well as distinguish between things as intangible and blurred as different modes of thought, from these sequences of classroom talk certain important themes emerge regarding the Waldorf approach to knowledge-building. These point towards both its strengths as a classroom-based learning discourse and deeper, more problematic aspects of its epistemological and ideological framework.

Foremost, and an aspect of the Waldorf approach only discernible from experience of lessons, is the importance of classroom discourse (rather than texts) for knowledge construction and transfer. Details of lesson talk give direct insight into learning method and the nature of representation. Whilst reflecting on my own practice and exploring the views of teachers highlights the general importance attached to imagination, only in the lesson context can this fully appreciated, in a phenomenological sense, as a lived experience of learning. What then emerges is a distinct form of learning discourse; one based primarily on moments of image-building punctuated by recall and questioning. However, as shown here, each teacher shapes this process into a personalized learning strategy. Hence, whilst the Waldorf's threefold schema underpins each example, as learning strategies integrating imaginative and rational discourses they show considerable variation. Before considering deeper aspects of the philosophical framework and its implications for learning geography, important aspects of classroom practice, including the worldviews constructed in these contexts, need to be identified.

Although the strength of the imaginative transaction depends largely on the teacher's confidence and natural communicative ability, particularly the use of language devices to construct geographical images (as well as intonation, gesture etc.), the cognitive dimension, on the other hand, relies on the more conscious process of planning and forming judgements. In this respect teachers' views on the intellectual dimension of learning and its place in Waldorf's spiritual, developmental framework are crucial. In their presentations, Teacher's A and B (in the observed study), for example, rely heavily on sequences of questioning and answering to stimulate reflective thinking. Although their intellectual schemata and techniques differed (one drawing explicitly on geographical concepts, the other more loosely framed on cause and effect), both of these strategies attempted to elicit, using a more rational schema, clearly-defined ideas from the pictorial. Compared with my own approach (and Teacher C's), these teachers developed

the cognitive element of learning with considerable rigour and effect.

With regards to the educational philosophy, this dimension of learning discourse highlights two fundamental principles of Waldorf's epistemological framework. Firstly, the importance Steiner attached to the notion of "concrete images", or graphic pictorial images grounded in detailed description of the world (re: Teacher's A's map-reading sequences). These can be perceived as pictorial thought-forms that inspire reflection and questioning, in so doing acting as a bridge between the imaginative and the rational. Attempts to combine these two elements were evident in all the lessons observed.

Secondly, and directly related to this, is the personal challenge involved in nurturing this more aesthetic, intuitive form of cognitive engagement. Whilst the Waldorf system offers no theory or formula for such a learning strategy, and class context (pupils' intellectual and artistic abilities, for example) has to be taken into consideration, these studies clearly suggest that knowledge-building needs to strike a balance between both modes of thought. In this respect discourse sequences involving intensive exchanges with pupils, drawing directly on their interpretations of the lessons' descriptive, pictorial content, are particularly significant.

Regarding the representational aspect of the learning discourse, these studies clearly show a form of geographical knowledge embedded in Waldorf's holistic worldview. In this respect they resonate with the various streams of cultural-geographical thought discussed above; albeit framed on crude forms of natural determinism, evoking, in a humanistic sense, a powerful sense of place. However, just as learning strategies reflect different interpretations of Steiner's child archetype, the geographies constructed reflect different renditions of the holistic worldview. Firstly, the historical, narrative element, and hence the degree of Eurocentricity, showed some variation. Secondly, the holistic conceptual framework underlying the knowledge-building process was also adopted with some versatility. Although my own approach relied heavily on the metaphysical unifying principle of the natural region to draw objects together, other teachers did not adopt such an ontological framework, preferring instead to use descriptive empiricism to achieve more traditional goals (for example, to indicate simple causal relationships between nature and people). However, in each case the natural region, in its synthetic conceptualization, remained the dominant form of spatial definition. As such, only occasional reference was made to matters of nationhood, power or exploitation. These

studies therefore show that whilst the underlying philosophy leaves its distinctive mark on the knowledge constructed, as a framework relying on free personal interpretation and application, geographies develop in different ways.

Moreover, considering the two archetypes working in unison, a fundamental tension in the knowledge-building process begins to emerge. On the one hand, lesson discourse highlights the strength of the pedagogical experience when ideas are allowed to form around imaginative and intuitive thought-forms. Although difficult to apply as an integrated learning method, at times teachers' narratives evoke both a sense of wonder and spontaneous cognitive engagement, or the need to understand. On the other hand, although pedagogy is based on the philosophical principle of freedom to think and learn without rigid intellectual schemata, the knowledge constructed is also positional - a feature that is reinforced by both the level of authority the teacher commands over the learning discourse and its inherent, repetitive structure. What therefore appears as a free and naturalistic learning process, on closer inspection, leads pupils, inevitably, towards a subjective worldview. Further evaluation of the place of such a representation in today's world is given in my concluding discussion (4.4).

In conclusion, these empirical studies stimulated further reflection of my own interpretation of the educational philosophy, in so doing highlighting, and also problematizing, key features of Waldorf's philosophy. To continue this investigation of the archetypes guiding the knowledge-building process, attention will now turn towards three further examples of classroom practice, each focused on the same main lesson theme and pupil age group. A similar method will be adopted, drawing in-depth on classroom talk to explore the Waldorf learning experience and the worldview it presents to pupils. From this, further insight will hopefully be gained into the challenges confronting Waldorf class teachers. This will also enable the opportunity to develop the more critical aspects of this analysis; in particular, the need for learning discourse, in its imaginative, rational and representational dimensions, to achieve balance.

Chapter 4

Focus Study of Classroom Discourse and Knowledge Construction

4.0 Aims, Contexts and Method

In the previous chapter the philosophy underpinning the Waldorf approach to geography was explored through both dialogues with teachers and classroom discourse. Focusing on the two salient features of the philosophy identified in my theoretical review (Steiner's image of the child and holistic worldview) it emerged that, although imaginative pictures and holistic forms of representation are common features of the knowledge-building process, teachers' learning strategies differ. As well as highlighting the gap between theory and practice in an approach that depends primarily on the teacher's own interpretative schema, these short studies also identify potentially problematic areas of learning method and representation. Given the significance attached to teacher-pupil relations in the Waldorf class system, and as a key element of the communicative method, attention was also drawn to class context.

Since, in the school context, classroom talk has clearly emerged as the primary medium through which pupils' are led to an understanding of the world, this study will continue with analysis of lesson discourse, as a means to gain further understanding of the philosophy framing practice. Focus will remain on the following two distinctive features of the knowledge-building process:

The way understanding is reached. So far this study has shown that teachers attempt to integrate imaginative and cognitive learning discourses in different ways. Fundamental to this is the teacher's interpretation of the anthroposophical child archetype and views on developing the intellect. Attention therefore needs to be given to both the in-class learning experience and teachers' underlying aims and objectives.

The way the world is viewed. While classroom discourse has highlighted key elements of the worldview underpinning the geographical imagination (assumptions regarding the relationship between man and nature, natural regions, historical contexts etc.), this does not necessarily exclude other forms of representation. Further consideration will therefore be given to the holistic geography constructed, in particular its culturally embedded meanings.

Because the previous studies indicated that class seven pupils, with their emerging awareness and intellectual faculty, are more likely than younger classes to challenge Waldorf methods, particularly the role of the teacher as knowledge authority, focus will remain on the twelve to thirteen age group.¹ To avoid being drawn into areas of practice marginal to the theme of this research, it was felt that certain conditions had to be met. Firstly, that teachers were experienced and had taught more than one cycle. Secondly, that they had an established relationship with their class. Thirdly, that the school had a developed anthroposophical culture with secure support structures. In this respect it was important that all teachers were adopting Waldorf methods and, additionally, were not working under abnormal pressure or struggling with exceptional behavioural difficulties. Fourthly, the themes of the main lesson blocks needed to be similar. Further ethnographic data for each case study is presented in Table 2 below, although relevant details of each school, teacher and class are given in the appropriate section.

Regarding data collection, this study used the approach adopted in 3.4 to generate hermeneutic data. Given Waldorf's oral pedagogy and the importance of discourse for knowledge-building, narrative and dialogue were recorded during lessons (both by hand and digitally). This pays attention to what Hart describes as the 'dynamic interplay of the trinity of educational practice: teacher, student, and subject' (2006: 8), or, from another viewpoint, 'what is said, by whom, to whom and how' (Alexander 2001: 430). Three interviews were also recorded for each case study; two with the participating teacher (before and after lesson observations) and one with a small group of pupils towards the end of the main lesson block. Interviewing teachers aimed to identify specific personal agendas that may impact on the lessons as well as provide relevant personal information and background to the lessons. Dialogue with teachers also explored the content of lessons observed. A short interview with pupils enabled me to also incorporate their views into my analysis. To further contextualize the case studies and make them more concrete, photographic evidence was also collected.

Regarding data representation, as with the earlier study I felt it important to capture as much of the learning experience as possible. Since pupil engagement in knowledge-building largely involves listening to narrative and verbal exchanges with the teacher, sequences of classroom discourse are presented as they were recorded. This, however,

¹ Woods et al indicate that pupils are most likely to challenge their teacher, as an 'authority figure', from classes 6 to 8 pupils (2005: 95). However, it is not specified whether this is behavioural or pedagogical.

presents the sampling problem of how to select extracts from 50 hours of lesson observation. A useful guide was the following criteria used by Alexander to present ‘text from (recorded) talk’ (2001: 439-441). Firstly, sequences should provide a vehicle for commentary on the theoretical aspects of practice being examined. For this study, it meant they should indicate key moments of pedagogical discourse, highlighting learning method and representation of the world. Secondly, they should be of sufficient length to allow them ‘to be read and understood as coherent acts of teaching, not merely as disembedded instances of pedagogical talk’ (2001: 441). Given the importance of teacher-talk for knowledge construction and transfer, sequences are therefore quite lengthy. Moreover, given the general unfamiliarity with the practice under investigation it is, as Alexander recommends, ‘as important to show as to try and explain’ (2001: 441).

Table 2: Overview of the Three Case Studies²

	<u>Case Study 1</u>	<u>Case Study 2</u>	<u>Case Study 3</u>
<u>Ethnographic data</u>			
<i>Setting</i>	rural	suburban	suburban
<i>School</i>	established 1925, 600 pupils, 3-19 yrs	established 1949, 440 pupils, 3-19 yrs	established 1946, 280 pupils, 3-17 yrs
<i>Teacher</i>	female (second cycle)	male (third cycle)	male (second cycle)
<i>Class</i>	class 7, 18 pupils ³	class 7, 30 pupils	class 7, 26 pupils
<i>Main lesson topic</i>	Africa	Africa	Asia
<u>Hermeneutic data</u>			
<i>Lessons observed: number (total hours)</i>	10 (20 hours)	8 (16 hours)	7 (14 hours)
<i>Extracts of classroom discourse used</i>	18	18	14
<i>Interviews: with teacher (pupils)</i>	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)

² Table adapted for this study from Nielsen (2003).

³ This case study involved further observation of Teacher A (previous study). Class numbers were significantly smaller than the previous year.

In an attempt to convey the pedagogical experience, analysis proceeds incrementally after sequences of discourse have been presented. Allowing the salient features of the discourse to emerge, as much as possible, from the text resonates with the phenomenological impulse of the philosophy being investigated, as well as my own views on knowledge construction. As noted above, it is not my intention to understand, from a socio-cultural perspective, the linguistic element of knowledge construction (Mercer 1995), but to consider discourse in relation to its pedagogical goal - as a medium that engages pupils in the building of a geographical imagination.

Ultimately, however, the question of how to balance representation and analysis in a way that neither emasculates the original experience, nor presents it without any interpretive guidance, is a matter of personal judgement rather than theoretical procedure. Hopefully, therefore, these case studies give the reader a sense of Waldorf's holistic learning method and subject knowledge - the discourse's 'status and force, which are independent of the commentaries which follow' (Alexander 2001: 441) - without excessive theoretical reduction. As before, analysis begins by identifying patterns in classroom discourse and how this relates to the archetypal lesson structure (as outlined in 1.4). Commentary then follows on the extracts of lesson talk presented, drawing on the knowledge-building process as it progresses. This leads to a discussion of how each teacher approaches the main lesson. General themes that emerge regarding the philosophy underpinning practice are considered in the concluding discussion (4.4).

4.1 Case Study 1: Context and Preview of Main Lesson

For my first case study I returned to School X to observe Teacher A, nine months after my previous visit. As shown above, this teacher had strong views on pupil involvement in learning, expressing her motivation to challenge what she described as Waldorf's 'too formulaic and passive approach.' With this in mind, and prior to observing lessons, I interviewed Teacher A to find out how she thought her class had changed and, if so, how she was adjusting to this. I also wanted to explore further her views on geography and her intentions for this main lesson block on Africa.

During the interview Teacher A described her class as 'gregarious, but with a strong sense of group.' She also stressed that their self-awareness had emerged as a potent force over the past year:

They now have a tendency to be preoccupied and internalized.. introspective in a way that can become crippling, so this needs to be transformed, in a way.

I asked her how she was addressing this:

I invite them to look at the world and think about it, rather than about themselves. In class six they were happy doing maps that were absolutely accurate, but now I want more qualitative content coming from them. I'm trying to lay the foundation of self-reliance.

Focusing on geography, she then emphasized how her involvement with rural communities, which she described as a life 'all connected with the geography of the place', had had an impact on her approach to the subject:

They [the pupils] have to have an ongoing sense of the land, not so much conceptual, but as close as possible an experience of the land. I think for them to have an imaginative experience of different places is an important goal.

Although this concrete, pictorial element of knowledge had been a key feature of the lessons previously observed (study 3.4), Teacher A had also applied a clearly-defined intellectual schema, and in a more rigorous way than the other lessons I had seen. I asked her whether it was her intention to engage both of these dimensions of thought in the learning process. In the exchange that followed she stressed that imaginative experience should lead to clear understanding with, for this age group, more emphasis on remembering i.e. the egoic-rational faculty, than forgetting:

R. *I'm interested in how they can build up a body of knowledge and skills in geography; to be able to remember it without compromising all the things we believe in, like sleeping and forgetting. So it's important to translate information in a deliberate academic way, and working with maps.. real mapping skills.. is a way to do this, as well as all the other things.*

I. *So, there are two elements to consider, the pictorial and the more rational and conceptual?*

R. *Yes, and I think we neglect the latter.. the discipline of learning, but equally we don't want it to be too barren, as I experienced in the state system. So, if you take the Nile, for example, you can give them the experience, but also get them to understand it in a different way, such as how it looks on a contour map. But I do think the precious thing is the experience, but I don't want to go too much that way either.*

For Teacher A, building up such a 'body of knowledge' was essential to the activity of learning. In this respect she identified a potential problem with the Waldorf approach:

I don't want them to spend the whole main lesson listening or drawing a border. Is this really what they've got to do? I met a lot of ex-Waldorf pupils and they said they heard a lot of stories but never learnt anything. I want them to do the content rather than it always coming from me. We have to pave the way for them to find out more for themselves, to search and discover. They should be moving much more into active learning, otherwise they get to class 9 and, if it's left for them to do the work, they don't know what to do. Then the teachers are pulling their hair out because they've

only ever listened to their class teacher. So I like to think I'm stretching them all the time.. trying a variety of ways to address that. This doesn't happen in many of their lessons. I try to make my method fluid, not boxed. You can play with this archetype.

This raised the question of how to integrate a more 'active learning' strategy with Waldorf's focus on the imagination. I therefore asked how she intended to lead her class from the pictorial element to a more reflective mode of thinking, or a more clearly-defined form of knowledge:

They have to have a sense of knowing something, but I don't want to compartmentalize the knowledge. I want to try and stimulate their understanding, to get them to the 'why' that way, from my descriptions and sketches. I don't want them to be completely cerebral and just speculate. It has to be grounded.

Finally, focusing on how she intended to present Africa, Teacher A stressed that she wanted to convey a 'sense of the mystery and indomitability of nature; its harshness and resistance to control', and that coverage of 'cities and modern geography would be minimal.' Although emphasis on the natural, including human adaptation, draws a particular worldview, she did suggest that the picture would be broadened in other ways, notably by homework based on pupils' own research and talks given by outside speakers. Furthermore, she also expressed a sensitivity towards the ideological position of her intended narrative: 'I want to talk about those people who went into Africa, not for gold, slaves or ivory, but for the spirit of adventure.'

4.1.1 Lesson Content and Analysis

This case study is based on data collected from a sequence of ten lessons within a four-week block, drawing on eighteen extracts of classroom discourse. As indicated above, these represent what I consider to be significant passages in knowledge-building, illustrating the way the geographical picture was constructed, recalled and then applied. In this respect they reflect Waldorf's holistic pedagogy or engagement with the threefold child archetype i.e. the faculties of feeling, thinking and willing (as shown above).

As noted by Alexander, text can only be a representation of the pedagogical experience (2001: 438), and, according to Scheurich's postmodern interpretation (1997), for example, a reduced version of the original discourse. What constitutes the learning environment (including class mood, lesson pace, intonation, teacher-pupil relations etc.) can therefore only be partially represented in a textual form. In an attempt to accommodate this, the same system of notation is used as in the previous chapter, to

convey a sense of the lessons' drama.

As before, the class were seated in the traditional Waldorf way; separately, in rows of individual wooden desks facing the blackboard. Once again, the only visible sign of the main lesson theme was a world map adjacent to the blackboard, although as the main lesson progressed various artefacts and pictures of Africa began to accumulate in a display.



Figure 7. Classroom (note: desks are not in their arrangement for a main lesson)

On first impression the informal atmosphere of the class suggested an open space for dialogue between teacher and pupils, although boundaries were clearly established. Generally, pupils were controlled with ease and only occasionally did the teacher need to raise her voice. Although in this respect classroom management seemed effortless, this relaxed authority would have taken a number of years to establish. Within this space Teacher A orchestrated knowledge-building, moving freely within the triad of her own voice, the pupils' and the subject matter. The lessons maintained an energetic pace but with regular pauses. Pupils were rarely disengaged from the ongoing discourse or writing

exercises.

In keeping with Waldorf tradition the first half hour of each lesson began with the following sequence of activities:

- pupils enter class and work quietly on bookwork or a set task
- stand to recite verse (whole class)
- poem, song or recorders (whole class)
- individual daily verses or speech exercise (usually a poem recital)
- short pupil presentation of a 'news item' and brief class discussion.

The remainder of each lesson then focused on the main theme.

Transcription Notation

T	Teacher
P	Pupil
PA	Identified pupil
PP	Several Pupils
A, B, C	Pupils named
//	Pause of more than 3 seconds
Bold text	Word(s) given particular emphasis
[text in square brackets]	Explanation, contextual information or description of activities
(number in brackets)	To reference lesson activities and/or extracts of discourse

Leading her class into a geography of Africa, on the first day the Teacher began with a brief recount of Magellan's journey (from the previous history main lesson), followed by a brainstorming exercise to find out what pupils knew about the continent. The teacher described this as a '*good accumulation of facts*' (1). She then began a brief introduction to the continent, which alluded to her intended narrative. As with all the presentations, the class listened intently.

T [Standing in front of class and projecting a strong voice] *We're going to go into the dark continent. Do you remember how the Portuguese got into it? There were lots of merchant movements.. toing and froing. People knew about the crusades and north Africa but didn't want to go and get sold into slavery. So the first adventurers didn't go there because it wasn't up for grabs. However, the most committed did manage to get there because they wanted gold, ivory or slaves, or to give Christianity, which they did as either a gift or a hammer. We've got a whole main lesson on Africa. In those days Europeans knew less about it than you do! (2)*

The class were then instructed to make a copy of a grid drawn on the blackboard and draw an outline of the African continent. During this exercise the teacher indicated the importance of latitude lines and the described the shape of the continent (3).

On the following day (lesson 2) the lesson began with a reminder that the outline map should have been finished for homework, followed by questioning to recall statements from the previous day's brainstorming (1). The teacher then instructed the class to look at Africa in their atlases.

T [Standing in front of class] *Just look at the physical map of Africa and compare it with South America. What do you notice from pure observation?*

PP *Africa's fatter at the top.. It's a triangular shape.. They both fit together!*

T *What would you say is the average height of Africa? Look at the colours on the map.*

P *Three quarters is less than 2000 meters.*

T *Where's the highest mountains?*

P *Ethiopia.*

T *What's the longest river?*

P *The Nile.*

T *You see, we can make statements about the special features of Africa and about the similarities and differences between one continent and another. This is what we need to think about when we look at the world. What else can you see?*

P *Africa has a flatter coastline than Europe.*

P *It has fewer islands around it than South America.*

T *What I find fascinating is the way each continent goes down into an emptiness! Now close your atlases. (2)*

[The lesson then focused on North Africa]

T *Now look at north Africa and make a statement about it.*

P *It's a desert!*

T [Holding up a picture of a sand dune] *Yes, and the most fearful thing in the desert is a sandstorm. When the wind whips up in an exposed sea of sand you get an incredible sand storm. Imagine how it feels!*

P *You can be buried under the sand!*

T *Yes, but not every bit is sand. You'd think nothing could survive, but it's a whole world of life, with people living there and adapting to its changing conditions and constantly moving. They're nomadic. What does that mean?*

P *They're looking for food.*

T *Yes, and they have a kind of mental map, even in the times of the crusades.. and they know where they can stop.*

P *At an oasis!*

T *Yes, a place of palm trees, wells and shade. A place to rest for their caravans of camels and horses. They still exist today! (3)*

At this point the teacher instructed the class to imagine what it was like to be in the desert and to write a list of adjectives to describe it (4). Then she continued her presentation.

T *Remember I told you that our first explorers didn't go into the desert because it was too vast and hostile. The people who live there are the most specialized people. With the force and power of the sky, sun and wind you have to learn to survive there. The Arabian tribes are incredible people.. tall and thin because it's not a place to be fat! People in colder places tend to be fatter. As you go around Africa you find people with different body shapes.. Nubians and Bushmen.. there are great differences. It's a combination of survival and bodily adaptation. We don't have to worry about that! (5)*

Commentary

At this stage it is helpful to indicate some key features of the learning discourse. As before, first impressions point towards the way the teacher skilfully builds the geographical picture and commands the lessons' cognitive direction and pace. This is fluent, engaging and closely controlled. Lessons also have a general structure which reflects Waldorf's integrated threefold method, proceeding from descriptive picture-building to more clearly-defined cognitive sequences and bookwork. This is revealed by patterns in the discourse and is adopted with some flexibility. For example, in lesson 1 a sequence of three dominant modes of exchange can be identified that correspond to the recall, presentation and application stages of the lesson archetype; eliciting (1/1),⁴ narrating (1/2) and giving instructions (1/3).⁵ On the second day, however, lesson structure becomes more complex, with the presentation involving both a question and answer sequence (2/2) and descriptive narrative (2/3 and 2/5). This discourse structure reflects Waldorf's general learning scheme, including its repetitive nature and the consolidation of meanings. This becomes clearer as the lessons progress.

Discourse structure, however, gives no indication of the ideas elicited and developed in the exchanges. Although withholding from further analysis at this point, two important features emerge. Firstly, and at the heart of the imaginative transaction, are vivid pictures of people and places. Secondly, the transformation of pictorial-images into more clearly-defined thought-forms. Consideration will be given to both aspects of knowledge-building after further lesson content.

On the following morning (lesson 3) recall led to a brief presentation:

T [Standing in front of class] *Yesterday we talked about one part of Africa. Tell me what you know. Remember, this is shared knowledge. We're building up a picture of the desert. (1)*

PP *Lots of nomadic tribes.. sand dunes and storms.. loads of mirages!*

T *Yes, and a wide sky. Any more facts? // Well, I know someone who lived with Bedouins. They were always on the move and following water. Most of the Bedouin have moved to the cities for education now. But those who are left know the story of the desert and how to live with the sand, which is always shifting, so you can't build a house on it. My friend woke up with a mouthful of it once! But if you go to where the water's stored in the rocky outcrops, you'll find cool shady places with scorpions and other predators.. a complete food chain [teacher briefly explains this concept]. Then there's the rainstorms. It doesn't come as a single drop but a torrent. And after it rains the desert comes alive with leaves and flowers, and all the creatures having a*

⁴ Referencing system to indicate sequence of lesson discourse (e.g. 1/1). The first number refers to lesson; the second to extract of discourse in that lesson.

⁵ This draws on Sinclair and Coulthard's typology of classroom discourse (1992).

wonderful feasting time. Just like magic! You can even watch the plants grow! (2)

As in the previous lesson there was a break in the presentation, when the teacher instructed the class to shade in the desert and mountains on their maps. She then instructed pupils to write a description of the Sahara and its people, stressing that 'It must start with something that captures my interest, so I want to continue reading', and 'be about facts, not speculations.' She advised the class 'to imagine being there as you write it.. to picture what the desert looks and feels like' (3). After a sample of these were read aloud she concluded her presentation.

T **Snakes that flung themselves from trees!** There were many stories that teased the European imagination. The Europeans were impelled by their imaginations, but didn't travel to Africa until the 1800s.

P One of the first European explorers got lost and had to drink his own blood!

T Well, I don't know about that but I know about Morocco [pointing to wall map]. In the Atlas mountains, with streams and snow, is a beautiful city called Marrakech. It's a real sense experience.. wonderful, colourful and spicy. Anyway, eventually the Europeans came down the west side here to Cape Verde and went inland to trade ivory. They went up the Niger River to a swampy area. It was very different to get to the Sahara. We'll look at that on Monday. (4)

On the following day (Lesson 5) the teacher picked up the main lesson theme by instructing the class to work in groups and 'make statements' about the previous day's

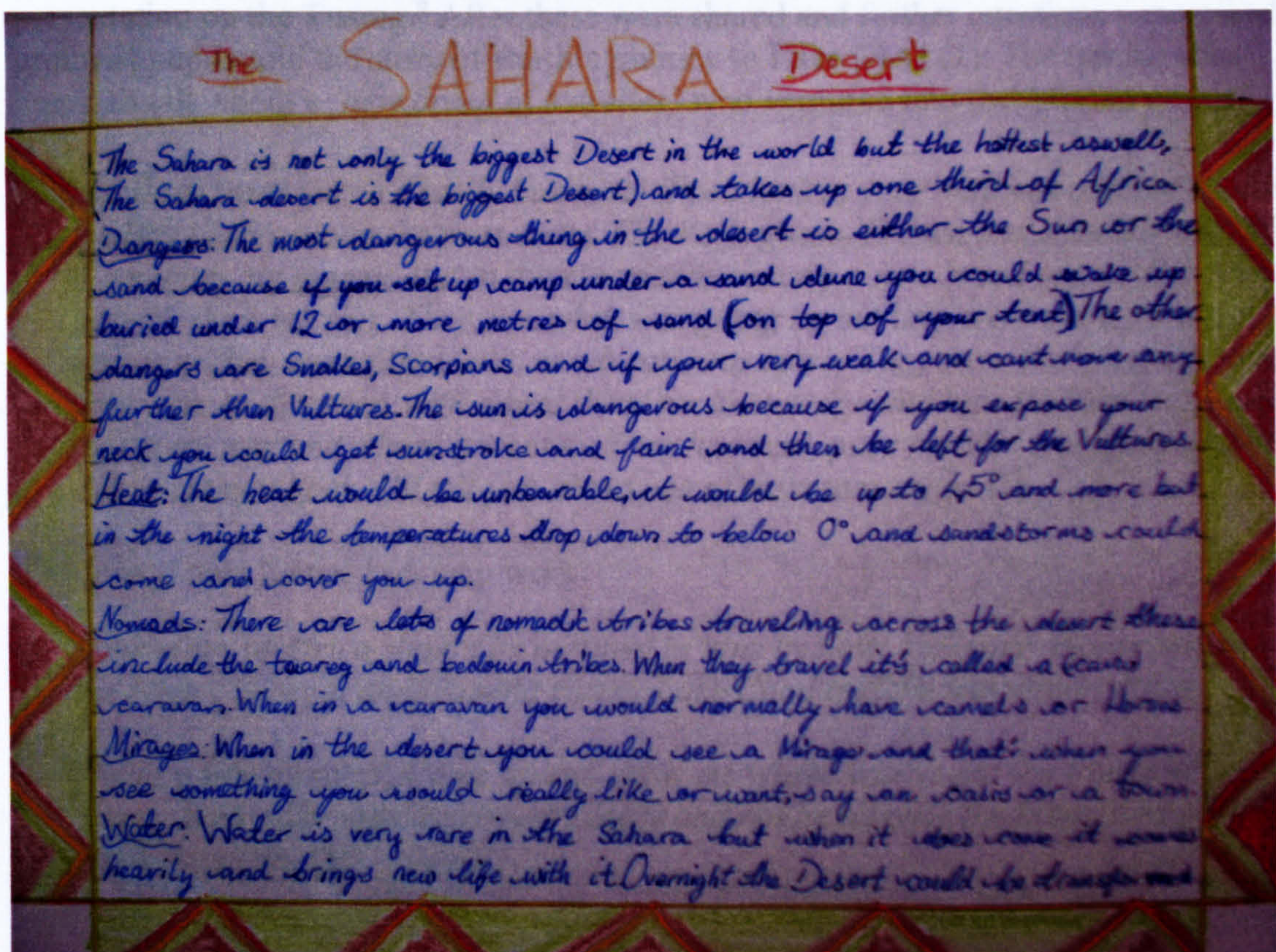


Figure 8. Example of pupil's work: a descriptive account of the Sahara.

During **lesson 4** the teacher picked up the main lesson theme with a short question and answer sequence, followed by a brief presentation:

- T *Tell me what you can remember about the Saharan terrain.*
- P *It's not all sand. Animals live there too.*
- PA *Only a third is sand. The rest is granite and stuff.. and caves.*
- P *When it rains the plants come up.*
- T *Tell us more about the sand.*
- PA *Wind and sand can make arches.*
- P *There's more stars than grains of sand.*
- T *What a wonderful thing to try and imagine! Tell us more about the rain.. 'drenching' and 'torrential' are good adjectives..*
- P *There's one village that hasn't seen rain for 17 years! (1)*
- T *If it does rain the sand quickly absorbs it like a sponge and the mud-brick houses start to crack. There are also incredibly shaped volcanic mountains. Four thousand years ago Ptolemy and Herodotus called them "mountains of the moon." They never actually went there but collected information and drew on myths and imagination. And then the Moslems came down and divided the region in half.. Arab tribes in the north and Negroes in the south.. in the darkest continent. As I said yesterday, the first explorers came to West Africa in the 1700s. We have a visitor coming to tell us about that area.⁵ You should now be noticing different countries in your atlas. (2)*

On the following day (lesson 5) the teacher picked up the main lesson theme by instructing the class to work in groups and 'make statements' about the previous day's presentation on the Tuareg.⁶ After these were shared and further questions were asked, a group of pupils told the story of Barth's journey to Lake Chad (1). The teacher then began to talk about a 'new breed of traveller' who ventured into the African interior.

- T *The slave trade was a ghastly business. If you look at your map you can see all these trading places along the west coast. The Portuguese, French and Spanish were all at it.. making big money. But in the nineteenth-century a new breed of traveller went into the dark interior. They saw what was going on but they were there for different reasons. They were filled with an adventurous spirit. They were the geographers and they went to discover, with a real thirst for knowledge and how the land was.. where that river was and where it went to. They had real, pure motives and many of them didn't make it back. I'll tell you about one of them tomorrow. (2)*

The lesson then focused on map work:

- T *Your maps of Africa should be outlined in blue by now. Use your atlases and put on the Niger, Senegal and Gambia rivers, Lake Chad and the mountain ranges.*

[After a few minutes] *Come up and show me where you've put the source of the Niger. Your river must represent reality and not be all over the place. You must also show the delta. (3)*

The teacher then drew the shape of the course of the Niger on the blackboard.

Commentary

As before, knowledge construction continues in an integrated threefold way, moving

⁶ This presentation described the environment around Lake Chad and the culture of the Tuareg.

from recall to give ideas clearer definition, to passages of narrative describing people and places, followed by application (bookwork). Within this framework learning discourse remains under close control, with elicitation sharply focused and little opportunity for open dialogue. However, with this rhythm the lessons flow at a relaxed pace and pupils remained engaged without being pressured.

Looking more closely at the way cognitive tasks are integrated with the main narrative highlights Teacher A's learning strategy. In activity 3/3, for example, pupils are instructed to clearly formulate their ideas by drawing on the pool of images. Map-drawing (e.g. 5/3) progresses as the geographical picture develops. A consistent feature of learning method therefore begins to emerge; pupils are given freedom to render knowledge imaginatively, albeit within the framework of the teacher's presentation.

In this sense learning discourse highlights the tension between method and knowledge content identified above. On the one hand, skilful use of language builds up a graphic picture which, at certain moments, achieves its pedagogical intention as an imaginative transaction (e.g. 3/4). Furthermore, this imagination is strengthened by the cognitive and repetitive element of the learning discourse i.e. recall and application. On the other hand, representation is heavily contextualized, drawing on stereotypes as well as the exotic (e.g. '...we are going into a dark continent'; '...down into an emptiness'; '...snakes that flung themselves from trees'). Moreover, whereas the geographers, with their 'pure motives', represent the (European) ideological high-ground, indigenous people belong to nature and therefore the long ago. Being grounded in a descriptive form of empiricism also strengthens this representation's ontological status which, on occasions, is further consolidated by the teacher's use of language (for example, reference to 'facts' and 'reality'). However, in the next lesson the ideological position of the narrative becomes more complex.

Lesson 6 began with a pupil's 'news item' on the deforestation of the Amazon. The teacher then asked pupils for '*one fact each*' about Barth's journey (1), before calling them to look at the '*dark green area on the map*':

T [Standing next to wall map] *See where the equator is. It runs straight through the rainforest. Barth and Mungo Park both tried to get there but never made it. It took another hundred years for anyone to make it. Then there was Lander. He also caught the fever to explore. As he set off on the Niger in his canoe all the indigenous people gathered to wave him off. He went through a place you couldn't imagine.. an equatorial rainforest so dense, lush and fast growing that if you blink another leaf has*

sprung up. You can almost watch them grow! It's so incredibly fertile and fast-growing, with amazing coloured flowers and the animals are so loud! The whole place is sticky and dripping with life.. wet, wet, wet! When it rains you don't even notice because it rains all the time. You don't need raincoats and all that kind of clobber. You just get wet! Then at 6 o' clock the lights go out. They don't have the long twilight that we have. I want you to find pictures of the trees that we can display. They've got many layers like multi-storey buildings and wide canopies.. not at all polite like our little trees. It's a wonderful, breathing, sticky, wet and humid place. Imagine how different it is to the Sahara. A totally different world! (2)

After another parent talk (on South Africa), the teacher began to reflect on the motives of European explorers and then apartheid.

T People came in their thousands to search for ivory, gold and slaves.. a wealth of minerals inspired their greed. But Mungo Park, what was he?

P An astronomer! [laughter]

P A discoverer!

T A geographer! I want you to carry in your mind the contrast between Mungo Park and Barth, and all those looking for wealth. Mungo Park was fascinated to find where the Niger came up, by the fact that the river flowed east. Then, later, other geographers and explorers were fascinated by the source of the Nile. These were huge moments in history.. of pure discovery.. pure geography.

P Were they mad?

T No! The ones who came for wealth were the mad ones! They took and took and took. The others weren't there for that. They saw a different Africa. Now, what you've just heard [referring to parent's talk] has given you a wealth of images. The blacks had to go down the mines.. that's how they survived. It was a dreadful life down in the dark. I spent so many years on protest marches to free the people of South Africa. They kept the blacks apart in awful, awful townships and the Europeans lived in luxury. It was all an instrument of European peoples' designs. I like to think of geographers, rather than those motivated by greed. (3)

For the remainder of the lesson the class annotated their maps, adding more physical features. (4)

During lesson 7 the teacher focused on the rainforest. This began with a recall of its main features and a descriptive sequence to build up a sense of place. This led to a writing exercise.

T Let's talk about the rainforest. Think about your senses. What would you taste, touch, see, hear and smell if you were there? Give me verbs and nouns to describe it.

P The sound of moisture.

T Yes. That's a lovely thought!

P Insects eating things.. they never stop!

T What else would you see or hear? Put your hands up!

P Different flowers.

T Yes, but generally it's green, green, green!

PB You don't get many animals on the ground, but you do in primary forest because it's unspoilt and much more open.

T Yes, it's much more developed and ordered there. Where would you find it?

PB In Borneo.

T That's the problem when trees are logged. There's an enormous reduction in the

canopy. It just flattens the whole thing. What else?

P Huge leaves!

T Yes, banana leaves are actually all leaf. They don't have branches. In the rainforest the trees have different layers and most of the animals live in the top layers.. in the canopy. What animals would they be?

PP [Shouting out] Monkeys! Birds! Macaws!

T Yes, **beautiful, beautiful** colours and **incredible** screeching going on. Not beautiful songs, but warnings. An adjective to describe it would be a '**clamour**'. Imagine how this contrasts with the Sahara at night, under a huge sky that stretches 360°, where you can almost hear the silence.. so profound! Contrast that with the **thick, sticky, wet, noisy, dense, crowded jungle**. (1) //

Now I want you to write an essay describing the contrasts using the big range of images and pictures that you've heard. Think by '**looking**' and '**listening**'. I'm trying to stretch you here. You'll have to think! (2)



Figure 9. Example of pupil's work: a hand-drawn map of Africa.

During the following lesson (**lesson 8**) the atlases were used to investigate the Rift Valley:⁷

⁷ The Rift Valley was considered in an extra main lesson on the previous day. This lesson could not be observed.

- T *Where did we end up last lesson? We were on the edge of a precipice.*
- PC *The Rift Valley.*
- T *Use a descriptive adjective.*
- PC *The Great Rift Valley!*
- T *Yes, it's the most phenomenal thing. [Holding a globe] What do we call this line?*
- P *The circumference.*
- T *It's 36000 miles. The Great Rift Valley earned its name because it's one sixth of the circumference. Tell me some more facts about it.*
- P *It's 30 miles across.*
- T *Yes, and it's almost vertical.. a 4000 feet drop. Almost sheer! There's no mountain like that here! How did it come about? // Show me with your hands. It was pulled apart as the crust opened [makes gesture with hands]. (1)*

[Teacher then sketches cross-section of the Rift Valley.]

- T *Well, in the 1890s a geographer called Godfrey went into the valley with his geology bag and found rock samples that indicated the valley had been pulled apart. Knowledge was different then. He didn't have a global picture. Only slowly did the idea about shifting continents emerge. Discoveries like this started a whole realm of thinking. Look at the Red Sea in your atlases. Imagine this pulling apart and how the sea was formed. Trace with your finger from Lake Malawi and the path of the lakes to the Ethiopian Highlands. This gives you an idea of the size of the Rift Valley. Look at the countries the valley runs through. What do you notice?*
- P *Some borders are in the middle of it.*
- T *Yes, it's a perfect border.. a natural division.*
[Teacher sketches course of Rift Valley.]
- T *Look at this section. It's like a great crack in the earth with volcanoes and earthquakes.*
- P *Is it hot in the bottom?*
- T *It's hot in the summer, but it's not rainforest here, it's more temperate with swamps and savanna. An incredible range of temperatures and climates between the desert and the rainforest. One of the most beautiful places on earth with every sort of bird, lakes and amazing sculpted salt rocks. Dr. Livingstone went there too. (2)*

For the remainder of the lesson pupils drew the Rift Valley onto their maps and were instructed to read about the region's bird life. (3)

Commentary

Through the versatile use of narrative the teacher continues to engage pupils in sequences of image-building, followed by questioning to engage pupils in a more reflective mode of thought. For example, rich, descriptive cameos of the rainforest (e.g. 6/2) draw on word-pictures to create a vivid sense of place. On the following day this is recalled in a qualitative form by drawing on the sensory imagination (7/1), and then used as the raw material for a writing exercise (7/2). In another sequence, focus on map-reading attempts to elicit knowledge in an immediate way, without the digestive and transformative process of sleep (8/1). However, the salient feature of knowledge-creation remains the close connection with the pictorial-affective realm rather than abstract forms of

conceptualization.

Essentially, the narrative remains embedded in a Eurocentric view of the world. For example, scenes of the rainforest become the setting for the 'pure motives' of the 'geographers', whose exploits bring an imperialist dimension to the narrative. In this sense the imagination of Africa as an exotic landscape waiting to be discovered is reinforced. Nevertheless, a dual narrative of colonialism (the 'mad' and the 'pure') adds an element of complexity. The ideological framework of this worldview is then consolidated through the learning discourse's repetitive structure, as these final sequences indicate.

During lesson 9 the teacher led the class around the room clapping and dancing to the rhythm of an African tribal song. She then instructed pupils to write a sentence about the Rift Valley and read out their compositions.

P *'When man went to the moon he could see the Rift Valley'.*

T *Now choose someone else.*

PD *'The Rift Valley was created by two tectonic plates moving apart.'*

T *How long is it?*

PD *About 6000 miles.*

T *What landforms can you see in it?*

PE *Volcanoes and lakes.*

T *What kind of lakes?*

PE *The deepest in the world! (1)*

The teacher then asked the class to work in groups and '*share facts*' about the Rift Valley. After pupils recorded these on the blackboard she led the class into a writing exercise.

T *Now I want you to organize these facts into a comprehensive whole and write an introduction using the heading, 'The Great Rift Valley'.*

Five minutes later a few samples were read aloud. The teacher then made it clear what she was looking for.

T *Your descriptions must have a word picture, so that if you close your eyes you can picture it. Give me an example.*

PP *A long trench .. thin and long... a sheer drop!*

T *Are these word pictures? Does the word create a picture? You should try and move into a celebratory mode. Now go back to your draft and include word pictures.*

Five minutes later more samples were read aloud.

P *The Rift Valley is one of the most amazing places in the world. The sides are a sheer drop with a plateau in between.*

T *That's excellent!*

PF *This is boring!*

T *Then you should make it pictorial! Then you could actually be in the Rift Valley. That isn't boring!*

PA *But mine isn't pictorial!*

[A few minutes later]

PF *Ok. I've made a word picture. The Rift Valley is a 'great scar'.*

T *A 'deep scar' would be better. (2)*

For the remainder of the lesson the class listened to the first project presentation.⁸

The final observed lesson (lesson 10) returned to the explorers. Instructing the class to look at the physical map of Africa, the teacher began to talk about the rivers.

T [Standing in front of class] *Look at the physical geography of Africa. Think back to the explorers. It took 400 years to penetrate Africa. There was an important group who were funded by the Geographical Society of the UK to explore new areas. This was the 'university' or 'High Church' of geography. These people went with a question. Remember Mungo Park? What river was he trying to find?*

P *The Niger.*

T *Yes. You may look at the mouth of the river and think, 'I'm going to find gold or I'm going to find ivory', or you may go with a really big question in your mind, 'Where does this river come from?' To picture the river in their minds they had to divide the land up into what we call "catchment areas". You may remember that term from way back in our class 5 geography on England, when we talked about how the tributaries came into the Thames. Well, this is what he was doing when he went up the Niger.. looking for how the tributaries led to the source of the river. These would lead to the remotest part of the interior of Africa, which was known as the 'dark continent'.. the last part to be penetrated. The Rift Valley we have been looking at was just one little barrier. Beyond that were the three rivers with their huge catchment areas, leading to the great unknown. Where are the source of these rivers? This question was on the mind of all geographers. This led to journeys through all sorts of incredible climates. Many people lost their lives in these operations (1). //*

What I want you to do now is work in pairs and actually explore the Congo and Nile and find all their tributaries. Indicate all these on your map as well as the watershed that separates them. You'll find some mountains at this point. Ptolemy referred to them as the 'mountains on the moon' and they were the last ones to be discovered. (2)

For the remainder of the lesson pupils worked on their map drawings (3). During this exercise the teacher indicated the position of the watershed by drawing a sketch-map.

Commentary

In lesson 9 recall moves from elicitation of facts (9/1) to a descriptive writing exercise focused on picture-building (9/2). Although, as in the previous lessons, this is not made to fit any pre-existing conceptual schema, learning discourse and knowledge is tightly

⁸ Over the course of the main lesson block each pupil gave a brief presentation on a country or theme related to the main lesson topic.

controlled, and in this sense, freedom of interpretation is limited. One pupil challenges the imaginative-pictorial element of representation.

During the following lesson the teacher returns to the narrative of exploration and the image of Africa as a 'dark continent', demystified by the scientific endeavours of Mungo Park et al (10/1). This perception is then consolidated in the mapping exercise that follows, which calls on pupils to 'explore the Congo and Nile' (10/2). In this sense the discourse of exploration permeates both the narrative and the cognitive task that follows. Discussion of Teacher A's representation of the world and the wider implications for learning continues below.

4.1.2 Discussion

This more extended sequence of lesson observations gives further insight into the Waldorf method of knowledge-building, including pupils' learning experiences and the worldview presented. Underpinning both the pedagogical and representational dimensions of classroom discourse are the two archetypes at the heart of the Waldorf approach, as they are interpreted by the teacher. This empirical evidence allows further evaluation of the strengths and problems of such a holistic framework, as well as the challenges confronting the class teacher.⁹

Regarding method, as one would expect, pedagogical discourse focuses primarily on building pictures through description, highlighting the importance attached to the imaginative, aesthetic-feeling realm of learning in the Waldorf schema. As noted above, Teacher A's skilful use of narrative, at certain moments, evokes a powerful sense of place, supporting her own claim that as "living images", the pupils will remember them for the rest of their lives.' In this respect there is clear evidence that she achieves what she intended; to convey an 'imaginative experience of different places'. Furthermore, both the economy and directness of the narrative approach did not go unrecognized, as one pupil remarked:

I used to go to a state school and we didn't hear about different places, we were given it, and if we didn't understand it we had to go to the library. But here we do more listening and it's easier. Books are harder to understand.

However, whilst the descriptive sequences are generally rich in imagery, the intellectual

⁹ This discussion draws on dialogue with the teacher and a short interview with a small group of pupils following lesson observations.

element is less certain. Although in our preview discussion the teacher had emphasized the need for a ‘discipline of learning’, by ‘stimulating understanding’ and ‘translat[ing] information in a deliberate, academic way’, in practice the cognitive dimension of learning is complex. Foremost, pupils’ thinking is largely stimulated spontaneously and organically by the teacher’s narrative, supported, on occasions, by intense questioning that draws directly on the image content (a method used more intensively by teacher B above).¹⁰ Unlike the main lesson observed the previous year, however, Teacher A does not use an explicit conceptual schema. Furthermore, close control of classroom dialogue limits the field from which information is drawn. Consequently, although pupils are encouraged to draw on their imaginations to construct (verbally and in written form) their own interpretations, the geographical picture is essentially given in the narrative. Thus, whilst Teacher A stressed the need for pupils to ‘take ownership of knowledge and not be spoon-fed’ (which she identified as a weakness of the Waldorf approach), pupil contribution to knowledge-building is, in reality, limited. This resonates with my own practice, further highlighting the potential epistemological problem of a discursive approach to knowledge building, particular one that draws primarily on teacher talk.

Secondly, as expected, the geographical picture presented is both holistic and deterministic. When questioned, Teacher A explained the rationale for her representation:

What I really want is to still have them at that stage where the natural conditions still dictate. To bring in too much of the modern day and situations they vaguely understand.. the politics and exploitation.. would be a real burden. So this remains in the background.

Although the premodern, naturalistic representation permeates the Waldorf geography curriculum (as discussed in chapter 2), it could, arguably, be explored and up-dated (through class discussion, for example) and still retain its imaginative power. As indicated by one pupil, the ideological position implicit in the geographical discourse did not unnoticed:

It would be nice to know more about who lived there. All those European countries went and took, but I don’t think they were very well received. She [the teacher] says ‘the British went and colonized’, but I think there was a certain amount of shame in that, and I feel tense with it. I wonder how they could have done that.

In conclusion, this case study highlights both the strengths of Waldorf pedagogy but also the challenges its philosophical framework presents regarding appropriate learning

¹⁰ It is assumed that pupils’ responses and questioning is an indication of their engagement.

strategy and geographical representation for this age group in the contemporary world. Although Teacher A clearly stated her intention to ‘play with the archetype’ and the need for her pupils ‘to be more definitive in their thinking’, the salient feature of classroom discourse - the worldview she constructs - still dominates the learning process. Furthermore, by withholding (in the Waldorf tradition) intellectual schemata and the more critical element of learning, the representation remains unquestioned.

Additionally, these vignettes show clearly how the geographical picture, through the process of oral transmission and repetition, is consolidated by method, creating a powerful learning discourse. Although embedded in its own holistic worldview and, as such, legitimate within its own belief system, this nevertheless raises important questions regarding Waldorf’s discursive method. Further discussion of the imaginative and cognitive dimensions of learning discourse will now be developed with reference to two further class contexts.

4.2 Case Study 2: Context and Preview of Main Lesson

The second case study was conducted at another large, well-established Steiner school which also ran from kindergarten to class 13. The class observed were the same age group as the previous case study (12-13 years) and, like the previous respondent, the teacher had considerable experience, having completed two cycles before his present class (which he took over in class 5). With a background in civil engineering and agriculture, and skills in music and art, Teacher B described himself as an ‘all-rounder, fascinated by the range of child development between seven and fourteen.’ He was also active in the school’s teacher training programme.

Prior to observing lessons, an interview with the respondent revealed strong personal views regarding aspects of Waldorf philosophy and the aims of teaching geography. Foremost, he stressed the developmental and spiritual significance of working with knowledge artistically rather than cognitively, stressing that Waldorf’s learning strategy is essentially the reverse of the mainstream:

Imaginative pictures help children develop in a really human way, more than literacy and numeracy, which are only really for our cultural epoch.¹¹ To build up knowledge in an imaginative way is a dramatic experience for pupils that awakens

¹¹ Here the term ‘epoch’ is used in an anthroposophical sense, drawing on the view that through the course of human evolution thinking has become less imaginative and more conceptual or abstract.

their thinking.. it really feeds the soul. It's not a definitive form of knowledge they need, but a picture that sparks their interest and develops into a truer form over a lifetime.

Nor was the subjective nature of this knowledge considered a cause for concern:

If you bring your inner picture to the class with true intentions, then it doesn't matter if it's subjective. Working as intensely with the children as we do, there is a karmic connection and they will know if the knowledge is untrue.

The importance of the imaginative-pictorial element of learning was further emphasized when conversation turned towards the forthcoming main lesson on Africa, including the existential and representational issues surrounding geographical knowledge:

I. *How important is the pictorial element for building knowledge in geography?*

R. *That's what engages them.. a strong imaginative picture. Geography gives a clear picture of where one fits into the cosmos. They may have travelled and have all kinds of images from the media, but their global consciousness is not fully formed. If I build a clear imagination and inspire them to go to places that would be great! You need to draw on a sense of wonder. It also helps them to look forward to growing up in the world.*

I. *How do you go about that?*

R. *They need a realistic picture.. a description of different cultures and places. In this main lesson a comparison of different parts of Africa will make the pictures more powerful, pointing out and celebrating the differences.*

I. *Does this include stories?*

R. *Yes. They should see life from different points of view as well as follow the journeys of the discoverers inland. I intend to do a clockwise journey, from the Sahara down to the east coast and then the rainforest.*

I. *How important is this historical context in the geographical imagination?*

R. *Well, if I read the Foucauldian positional thing, then geography should be mainly about today, although we need to show the impact of nature on people. Using a historical narrative is a nice imaginative way to do it, although you should only give reference to a historical context.. Victorian names etcetera. It's not right to dwell on that. So there has to be a bit of everything.. both modern and ancient. By class 6 and 7 subjects should be coming down to earth and children really want a reality of the present.*

I. *Can you do this imaginatively?*

R. *You need to bring factual content together into a picture form, in a balanced way.*

Whilst alluding here to the epistemological importance of concrete images in the Waldorf schema, I wanted to explore further whether he intended to develop, in an explicit way, the cognitive and reflective dimension of learning, apart from the ritual daily practice of recall and application. The respondent drew on this issue with reference to pupils' developmental stage:

I. *I have always found it challenging to find a balance between the imaginative and intellectual. I don't mean there has to be a defined learning strategy as such, but both elements need to be addressed. At first I lost the pupils because I was too*

- conceptual.¹² Then my method swung the other way and became very pictorial, and it unclear what they had actually learnt. How do you approach the main lesson?*
- R. *Well, their interest in knowledge is growing and their questioning things.. waking up to ideas. So they want to understand processes more than listen to stories, although the narrative should still be there, otherwise it loses imagination.*
- I. *So you bring both elements together?*
- R. *The more intellectual side can be approached through map-work, although that depends on the ingenuity of the teacher. These subject specific skills could be developed more in our schools.¹³ But in the lower school we aim to present an overview which should be done in an artistic way. A few pupils would get into all the heady stuff but most would get bored. As I said, it's a matter of balance between building imaginative pictures and understanding. Factual information and data should also be included.*
- I. *How do you achieve this balance?*
- R. *I have to consider the class as individuals and try and meet their needs.. engage with where they're at. Differentiation is a challenge though.*
- I. *And where are they generally 'at' at this age?*
- R. *Well, they're terribly interested in their own social lives and open to the internet, so I have to compete with that by drawing their attention to the world and different cultures, and make them involved.*
- I. *How do you do that?*
- R. *By inviting them to bring their own ideas into the class and listening to what they've got to say.*

Although firmly embedded in Waldorf's philosophy of the imagination, these exchanges also highlight Teacher B's personal viewpoint. Foremost, the respondent stresses the need for pupils to be 'actively involved' in what he described as the 'ongoing project of the main lesson', although the specific intellectual element remains unclear. Furthermore, this dialogue shows a sensitivity towards the cultural and historical position underpinning the intended narrative. Analysis of classroom discourse will now look more closely at the way the teacher works with both Waldorf's pedagogical framework and underlying worldview in the knowledge-building process.

4.2.1 Lesson Content and Analysis

This study draws on classroom discourse from a sequence of eight lessons within a four-week block on Africa and the Americas. As in the previous class, pupils were seated separately in rows of individual desks facing the blackboard. Pictures of explorers and exotic foreign landscapes - remnants of the previous history main lesson - adorned the classroom walls, indicating the historical theme for class seven. A large wall map of Africa hung next to the blackboard.

¹² This comment refers to the time I first began to teach main lessons.

¹³ The respondent described the geography component of his own training as 'flimsy'.

Like the previous study (4.1), the relaxed atmosphere of the lessons suggested a healthy relationship between teacher and class. Although the teacher was quietly spoken and only occasionally raised his voice to gain attention, pupils remained attentive and on-task throughout each two hour lesson. However, as might be expected given the larger class size (of 20 boys and 10 girls) and teacher B's relatively short time as their class teacher (8 terms), relations were more formal, with generally less chat and innuendo than the previous class.¹⁴ As before, there was no evidence of tension between teacher and class, which the teacher described as having 'a good social atmosphere.'

In keeping with Waldorf tradition the first half hour of each lesson began with a sequence of rituals and warm-up activities:

- pupils enter class and shake hands with the teacher
- light candle and stand for school verse or Lord's Prayer (whole class)
- poem, song or recorders (whole class)
- occasional discussion of a news item
- mental arithmetic exercise
- individual or occasional birthday verses

The remainder of each lesson then focused on the main theme. As with the earlier studies, the following extracts have been selected to highlight pupil involvement in knowledge-building and the worldview constructed. Analysis then develops incrementally, firstly by identifying general patterns in the learning discourse, followed by a focus on the salient features of method and representation. Comparisons with case study 1 are made as the analysis progresses. The system of notation for these transcripts is the same as before.

Lesson 1 began with an introduction to Africa.¹⁵ Standing at the front of the classroom, next to a large wall map, the teacher addressed the whole class:

- T *Look at this continent closest to us. Our connection with it goes back thousands of years, but the explorers knew little about its interior until relatively recently. What is this line?*
- P *The equator!*
- T *What's different below the equator, down here?* [points to South Africa]
- P *It's summer there now.*
- T *Yes, and down here the sun goes from right to left across the sky.*
- P *What if you're on the equator? //*

¹⁴ Sixteen pupils had been with the class since class one. Three pupils had recently joined from state schools.

¹⁵ This was a short lesson following school assembly.

[no response]

T *Imagine you were blindfolded and taken there. What would you see?*

P *Nothing!* [laughter]

T *I mean if you suddenly found your sight again?*

PP [Shouting out] *Grassland! The Lion King! Palm trees! A really red sun!*

T *Yes, and why is it such a beautiful sunset?*

P *There's dust in the atmosphere.* (1)

T *You can travel through Africa and find every type of climate and landscape, from rainforest to desert.*

P *It looks like a shoe!* [laughter]

T *Yes, and it's the second largest continent in the world, 130 times larger than the UK. The explorers started to discover many beautiful things.. the landscapes and the wildlife, herds of lions lying around, rainforest in near total darkness. Little people living in the desert down here. Can you imagine going into a place where people are all black? That would be amazing for medieval people! Remember your history.. the Moslems were in north Africa. There are so many different cultures and habits. A real place of wonder!*

P *It looks like an elephant's head!* [more laughter] //

T *A student I once taught went to Africa and her most vivid impression was how much the people smile, even if they don't have much. And their hospitality. Now I want to tell you a story. We may think of the ideal African as the Zulu warrior, with shields and spears, but most live simply as farmers with their cattle, and with a lot of time to think and play. In the great heat they live in small communities and have communal feasts. This is the story about one shepherd boy, called 'Jabu', and his lion.*

P *Is it a real story?*

T *Make up your own mind.* (2)

After the story the class were instructed to look at the different thematic maps of Africa in their atlases. Pupils were also told they needed to develop a mental picture of where the countries were and that they would be tested on this. (3)

Lesson 2 began with recall of the previous day's content:

T [Standing at the front of the class] *What can you remember from yesterday? How is Africa different to Europe?*

PP *The heat! The animals!*

T *Has anyone seen an animal in the last few days?*

P *I've seen five foxes, a rabbit and a squirrel.*

T *What would you expect to see in Africa?*

PP [Shouting out] *Snakes! Stray dogs! Rhinos!*

T *A huge range of animals! And what would you see up north here?*

P *A huge desert.*

T *Yes, and what image does the desert give?*

P *Wide open spaces with oases and dunes.* (1)

The teacher then began a presentation on the Sahara, describing the desert and its indigenous people.

T *And one dune is so large. Look here [points to map], it's the same size as France! Imagine that. And the dunes are moving south and so people have to barricade themselves in their houses [class engaged in total silence]. But that's the typical picture. In fact, only 15 per cent of the area is like that. Most of it is stone and rock.. a*

terrifying space that looks like the sea when you fly over it. And if you're there you may see a camel train emerging from the distance.. balancing water with their wide, flat feet. They can extract the moisture from plants and drink up to six gallons a day. And with the camels are the Tuareg in their long clothes to keep the sweat in. They're a very special tribe of nomads who know their way across the desert, even without compasses, or when sandstorms whip up and hide the stars. In ancient times this was a wonderful, luscious place with many animals, then it all dried up and left a huge amount of salt. The Tuareg took it and sold it.

P Is the whole of the desert going to move down?

T It ebbs and flows.

P How quickly does it move? //

T You can find that out. Look in the National Geographic.

P But doesn't salt just make you more thirsty? //

P Where's Timbuktu?

T Look in your atlas.

P Did you know that the coastline of Sweden would go around the earth twice! Is that longer than Africa?

[no response] (2)

Following this presentation, a list of words associated with deserts was written on the blackboard and pupils told to find their meaning for homework. The teacher then carefully drew an outline map of Africa using a grid, which the class copied (figure 10). This drew comments from pupils regarding the shape of the coastline compared to Europe. (3)

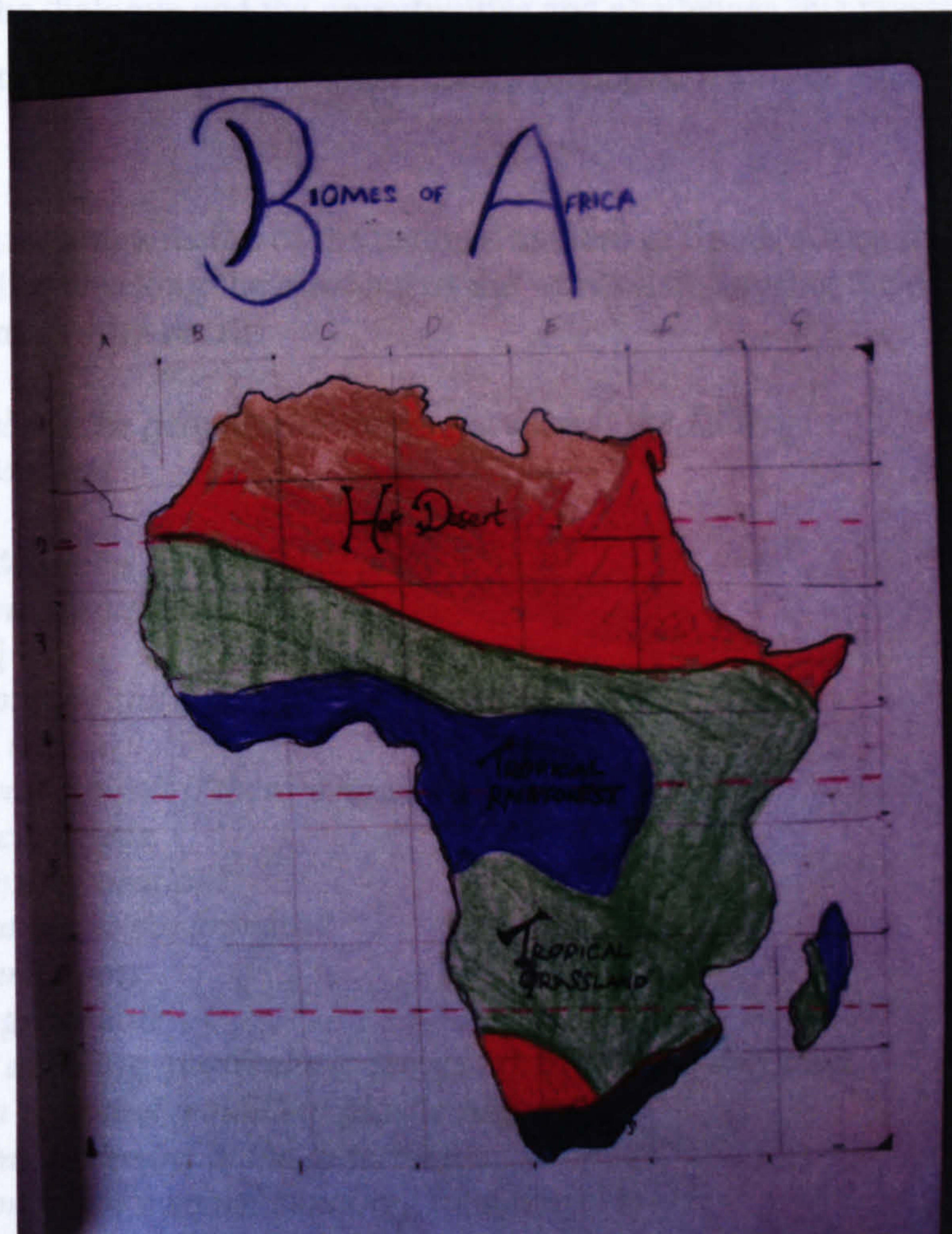


Figure 10. Example of a pupil's hand-drawn map of Africa.

Commentary

At this stage it is helpful to identify key features of the learning discourse. Using a similar approach to the previous teacher, Teacher B engages his class using a combination of descriptive narrative interspersed with sequences of questioning, followed by map-drawing. This pattern follows Waldorf's threefold method, moving from moments of recall (question and answer) to presentation (narrating/listening) and instruction (for bookwork). This format is most clearly shown in lesson 2. As a whole, each lesson therefore progresses rhythmically through stages of focused reflection, imaginative picture-building and recording of information. This highlights the holistic principle underpinning Waldorf's narrative method. Probing further into classroom discourse, however, two important features emerge. Firstly, how imaginative narrative built on simple empirically-based description both engages and provokes thought (e.g. 2/2). Secondly, the exotic, naturalistic and idealised nature of the representation. Before considering these aspects of knowledge-building, further lesson content will be presented. Of particular interest in the following sequences is the openness of the dialogue and the opportunities and challenges this presents. Also noticeable is the way the geographical picture broadens.

Lesson 3 began with a recital of the national anthem of South Africa in different languages. After checking the meaning of the words listed during the previous lesson the teacher continued with recall:

T *Tell me about the people who live in the desert, the Tuareg.*

PA *They're Moslem.*

T *Why?*

PA *Because Moslems invaded that area.*

P *Would you get attacked in the desert? //*

[no response]

T *What about the salt?*

P *They sell it.*

PB *How do you get salt if there's no sea?*

T *From ancient seas.*

PB *You mean evaporation?*

T *Yes. What about the animals?*

P *Camels and goats.*

P *What do goats eat?*

T *They eat anything, particularly things other animals don't eat.*

P *We had a goat that would eat plastic bags!*

P *I saw some Bedouins in the desert once.*

PB *Has anyone seen a camel running? [laughter] (1)*

The teacher then began his presentation:

T *It's only a century ago that people started exploring the Sahara. Further down, in the Sahel, it changes. There are more Christians and tribal conflicts.*

P *Is Algeria bigger than Sudan?*

[no response]

T *This is an old-fashioned picture of the Tuareg, but now they have jeeps rather than camels, and some wear T-shirts. Many have had to move out of the desert and settle, and follow the laws of the government.*

P *When you walk in the desert do you see other people?*

T *It's so vast, you don't meet anyone. And it's monotonous.. a barren, rocky landscape.*

P *How big are the rocks?*

T *Huge. It was once a sea bed. And it's extremely hot and then freezing at night. At this place here.. Libya.. there's a lot of oil and gas. It's run by Gaddafi. He's an enemy to the British. They train terrorists there. It's vast and hidden away. (2)*

The teacher then drew attention to the outline map, drawing in the major biomes and listing their key features. He then instructed the class to write a 'full description' of the Sahara based on what was 'heard and remembered' (3). After 20 minutes he continued his presentation:

T *Here in the Sahel there's an amazing, gradual change between the desert and grassland. If the grass is overgrazed it can turn to desert, so it's difficult to make a living, particularly as the population rises. Here's some millet [shows class]. Farmers struggle to grow it and if it doesn't rain there can be famine, and with climate change the Sahel may become a part of the Sahara. If you go there one day you'll see how hard it is to live there. Beautiful places that open up to the sky and wonderful colours of earth and sunset, but also extreme hardship.*

P *I know someone who lived there and had to travel miles for water.*

P *Why don't they just move to another part then?*

T *People tend to stay where their roots are.*

PC *Every minute a child dies through lack of water.*

T *Life goes on and their not miserable.*

PC *I bet they'd love a tap though. (4)*

Commentary

Although in this sequence recall is tightly controlled and repeats factual content, the narrative then evokes a sense of place. A noticeable feature of these presentations is the breadth of the geographical picture, drawing on both aspects of natural and cultural diversity and human adaptation, as well as contemporary issues regarding environment and human displacement. To a certain extent this more updated perspective (e.g. 3/2) balances sequences drawing more on stereotypes and idealisation (e.g. 1/2, 2/2).

However, as shown below, focus on the primitive and exotic remains a powerful element of the geographical discourse.

Lesson 4 began with pupils reading aloud their portraits of the Sahara. Pupils were then asked to draw a sketch of the desert from imagination. A question and answer sequence then reconstructed the picture of the Sahel presented on the previous day (1). This was

followed by the teacher's presentation:

- T [Standing next to wall map] *Look at Ethiopia. It has no access to the sea. What's the disadvantage of that?*
- PP *No fishing.. Trade!.. No beaches.*
- P *It must be strange to have no beaches.*
- T *Remember your history main lesson and the spread of Christianity. Christian Ethiopia surrounded by Moslem countries. They don't eat pork or shell-fish and have their own views on Christianity.. beautiful churches and wonderful stories. It's now divided between Moslems and Christians. A strange thing is a plant they chew called 'khat.' It's a kind of drug that makes your pupils large and your teeth go green.*
[laughter]
- P *Is it 'class A'?*
[no response]
- T *The capital is Addis Ababa, that's a lovely sounding name. It's a big, modern city with a democratic government. There's been a lot of war with Somalia. And here's a huge rift valley. Remember the tension between the tectonic plates and how the land dropped down and filled with water to leave these lakes? [Draws a sketch on blackboard]. This valley is wide and beautiful, with wild species and billions of birds.. a huge pink lake of flamingos. They also found the world's oldest complete skeleton here. They called it Lucy! [laughter] It's over two million years old.*
- PD *Is this the Garden of Eden then? Do you really believe in that?*
- T *Yes.*
- PD *What about the dinosaurs then? [comment evokes chatter]*
- T *I think this is more for a religion lesson.*
- P *Someone said there were two Jesus's. Is that true?*
[no response]
- P *How long did it take for the valley to slip down?*
- T *I've no idea, probably hundreds of years. (2)*

The teacher then instructed pupils to draw a picture and write a descriptive portrait of the Sahel. Complaining that they didn't know what to write, the teacher made a list of key words as a guide (3). The lesson ended with an African folk-tale.

Commentary

Compared to the previous teacher, Teacher B exerts less control over classroom dialogue. Consequently, although the geographical picture is constructed primarily by the teacher's presentation, it builds in a more open and collaborative way, drawing on pupils' spontaneous responses to the narrative (e.g. 3/2). Also noticeable is the rich factual content, clearly-defined ideas and the causal relationships implicit in the narrative, which only at certain moments takes flight in an imaginative sense. Nevertheless, through their descriptive detail the images clearly sustains pupils' interest. Also evident is the challenge of accommodating pupils' wide-ranging verbal responses to the holistic representation.

This more open discourse highlights two important aspects of the learning strategy.

Firstly, pupils are allowed to freely express their ideas, which broadens the viewpoint (for example, by challenging the teacher's worldview, re: 'Is this the Garden of Eden?'). Secondly, at times a lack of intellectual schemata or a conceptual framework makes interpretation of knowledge content difficult. This is evident in the way pupils struggle with the writing exercises (e.g. 4/3).

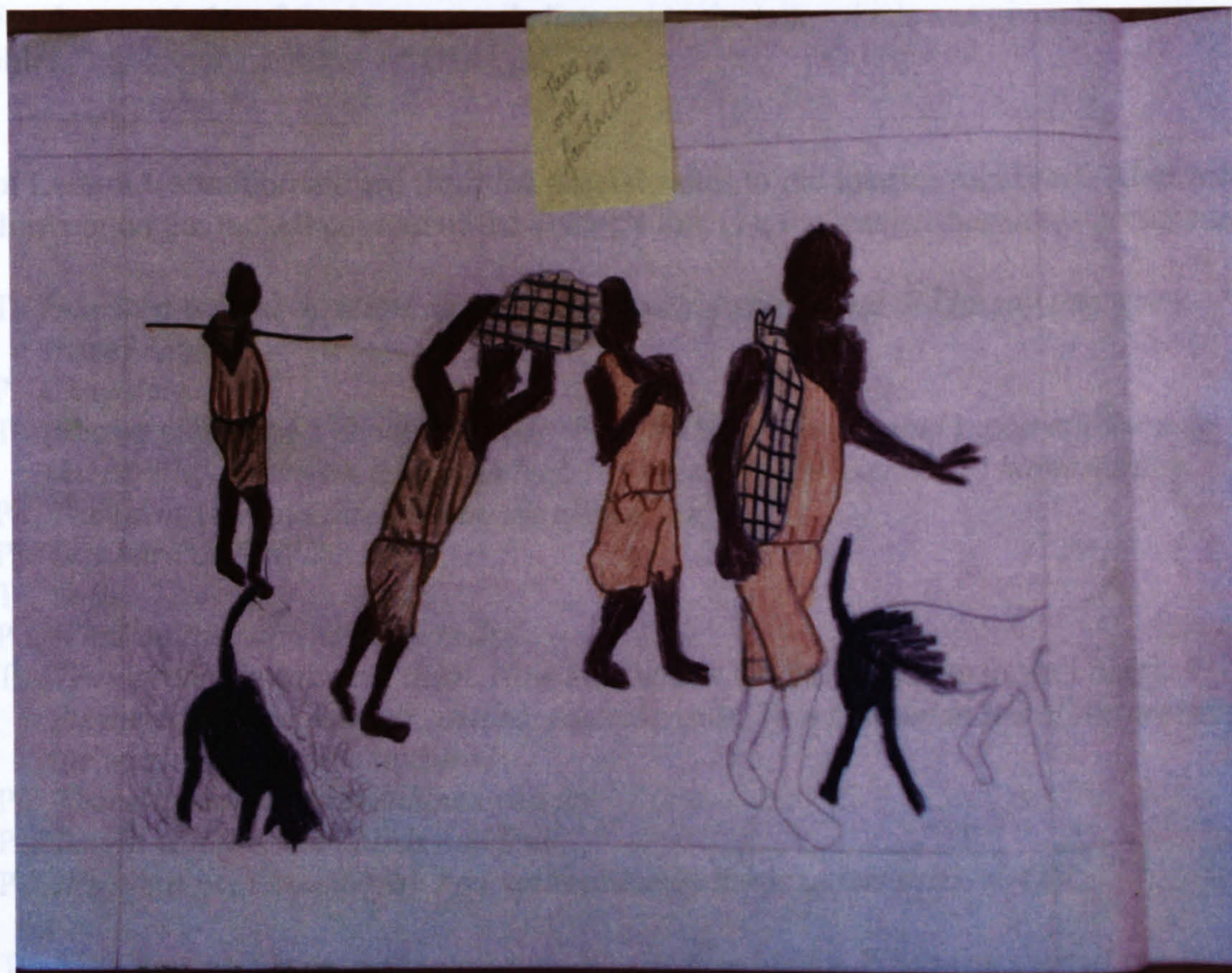


Figure 11. Work in progress - pupil's drawing of the people of the Sahel.

On the following day (**lesson 5**) the lesson began with a short sequence of factual recall:

T [Standing next to wall map] *We've been looking at the Sahara and the African Rift Valley. How wide is it?*

[no response]

T [Pointing at wall map] *It's twice the distance from there to London.. **6000 miles long!***

T *Tell me a little about Ethiopia.*

P *It's hilly with no access to the sea. They can't trade and it's poor.*

T *What do they do then?*

P *They take a drug that makes your teeth go green [laughter].*

T *What else?*

P *It's difficult to move around because the roads are so bad.*

P *They grow coffee as well.*

PP [Shouting out] *Gold! Seeds! They're Christian and Moslem.*

T *Yes. About half and half. We'll come back to that. (1)*

Now we have a visitor coming who comes from Ghana. [Pointing at the blackboard

map] *Which biome is that in?*

P *The tropical rainforest.*

T *Yes, and it's quite a rich country, with lots of gold. Look here, you can see it's by the coast and has many rivers, then inland it becomes savanna. Lots of variety. I want you to really listen to what he says and think about how life is different there. We remember the different things, these are interesting. What's it like to grow up in a place like that? Think about transport, religion, climate, water and what people do. It's so far away and foreign. (2)*

For the remainder of the lesson pupils listened to the talk, which was given by a village chief.¹⁶

In Lesson 6 attention moved from the coastal states to the interior rainforest. After recall drawing on the factual content of the visitor's talk (1), the teacher began his presentation:

T *He was a typical African.. stocky with beautiful skin. What did he say they grew there?*

P *Chocolate.*

T *[Shows picture of a chocolate tree] They slit the pod open and scoop out the pulp, then it's left to dry on a banana leaf. It's a very social exercise to harvest these.*

P *They don't always throw away the shells.*

P *Is it hard or soft?*

T *Soft.*

P *What do they do with the shells?*

T *They probably compost them. Now look where Ghana is [points to wall map]. It's on the meridian and equator, neither east nor west. To a Ghanaian it's at the centre of the world. What's it like there?*

P *That depends on whereabouts you go.*

P *Bright colours, with birds and fruit.*

P *It's not a poor country by African standards. It has universities. // (2)*

T *Now look at this area of rainforest. It's another biome. When you enter it you get a lot of rain, up to 6 metres a year.. a huge contrast with the desert! These trees reach enormous heights and the canopy almost blocks the sunlight. It's dark, dense, humid, hot and clammy. The trees grow straight and tall and some reach the canopy. They're called 'emergents', like a chicken coming out of the egg! Here the leaves are smaller and sharper and have a little funnel that collects water. In 1815 a scientist called von Humboldt recognised the diversity of life up there. A whole world of monkeys, parrots and plants almost divorced from the earth! Down at the bottom the trees have huge roots above the ground called buttresses. Remember the Norman castles? [sketches picture of castle].*

P *You can tour the canopy.*

T *Yes. How to get up and down is an issue! Imagine going up in a silent, gas-filled airship to look at the wildlife?*

P *When trees fall down lots of life springs up quickly. I saw it on TV. (3)*

The teacher then drew a sketch of the tree layers and spoke about life on the forest floor. Attention then turned towards human life.

¹⁶ This talk focused on traditional village life and customs, although reference was also made to modern Ghana.

- T *The people living in this warm, humid atmosphere are called pygmies. They're very small.*
- P *There are pygmy animals as well.*
- T *They build little huts for themselves. They're wonderful hunters and can kill monkeys with blowpipes. More recently they've come into contact with other people and they're not treated very well, almost as sub-human.*
- P *If they use poison how can they eat the meat?*
- T *Some poison will only make the animal drowsy. [Shows picture of pygmy] Look at him, he's a fully grown man but so small. He's wearing western clothes. They're common in Africa.*
- P *He looks pregnant, not fat! [laughter] (4)*
- T *Any questions about the rainforest?*
- P *If you picked up some soil would you find new things then?*
- P *A new beetle is found every hour!*
- T *Even up in the canopy you'll find earthworms. We've discovered all the earth and the moon but the canopy remains unexplored. (5)*
- T *Now look at the Rift Valley in your atlases. What do you notice?*
- P *Why do all the rivers have English names?*
- P *English discoverers!*
- T *Back in Victorian times the English were full of themselves, with a large empire. Livingstone went to Africa and named rivers after important people.*
- P *Doesn't the Amazon have more water, but the Nile is longer?*
- P *Why are the flamingos pink?*
- T *Maybe they're fed a dye.*
- P *Does that mean the babies are born white? (6)*

For the remainder of the lesson pupils copied a description of the Rift Valley from the blackboard. (7)

On the following day (lesson 7) a question and answer sequence elicited facts about the rainforest. This was followed by a presentation given on South Africa by another visitor.¹⁷ The teacher then set a written exercise:

- T *Now I want you to think about the first visitor and write about West Africa.*
- P *But he only spoke about Ghana. I don't know much about West Africa.*
[Teacher then writes a list of themes on the blackboard.]
- P *I don't know how to start. Do we have to cover all these things?*
- T *Yes, and more!*
- P *But we don't know anything about this region. I don't know where the countries are.*
- T *Use your atlas then.*
- P *What are we supposed to say? (1)*

After twenty minutes of written work a second recall sequence focused on the pygmies:

- T *What do you remember about the pygmies? What are they like?*
- PP *They're good hunters.. They know about plants.. They're seen as outcasts.*
- P *Incredibly short!*
- T *Yes, like this [demonstrates with a small pupil]. But they're normal in their own culture.*

¹⁷ This talk drew on many aspects of the natural environment as well as indigenous and modern culture, language and political conflict.

P *Why are they so small?*

T *They live in a dark, gloomy place. But they're not the only small people around. There's the bushmen too, who live down here. They also have special habits and gifts. They can feel if an animal is coming and where water is underground in the desert. They suck it up using reeds.. very wonderful habits! They know how to survive and go hunting for days and days. But they've had their land claimed too. It's sad how their way of life has been changed by the modern world.*

P *You can suck the water out of my fish tank using a tube.*

P *Don't they get sand in their mouths? (2)*

Commentary

These lessons continue with the same pattern of discourse; sequences of descriptive, empirically-based narrative, interspersed with questions and contributions from pupils. At certain moments, particularly during lesson 6, the geographical picture builds through exchanges with the class (e.g. 6/4, 6/5, 6/6). These sequences of discourse illustrate an intuitive, organic process of knowledge-building, which allows pupils to respond freely and spontaneously to the narrative. However, without a conceptual framework or interpretative schema to guide thinking and organise the mass of information and images, learning strategy remains uncertain or without clear direction, and therefore, at times, problematic. Once again, this is evident when pupils are given a writing task and are unsure how to approach it (7/1). Hence, whilst classroom discourse remains vibrant and engaging, the learning goal is, in a cognitive sense, unclear.

The geographical imagination constructed in these lessons draws heavily on nature and the adaptation of indigenous peoples. This is intrinsically interesting and engaging. Also noticeable, however, are the references to cultural integration (6/4) and geographical displacement (7/2) which, to a certain extent, both destabilizes and up-dates this otherwise idealised picture. Furthermore, at certain moments the geographical imagination is decentred (6/2) and stripped of any imperialistic design (6/6).

Lesson 8 began with the class singing an African song. This was followed by a closely controlled recall of the content of the visitor's talk and a brief presentation on the Masai, when the class were shown hand-crafted objects and pictures of tribesmen. After the teacher read aloud a sample of the pupils' cameos of West Africa, the lesson focused on map-work:

T *On the next page I want you to draw another map of Africa, using a grid like the first map. Show accurately where Africa meets Europe and the Middle-East, and don't forget Madagascar! Then put in the following rivers, lakes and towns [makes a list on the blackboard]. I want you to carefully shade in the different biomes and the mountains. See if you can find where the Nile rises, and what do you notice about where it enters the sea?*

P *It's a delta.*

T Yes, and it's shaped like the Greek letter [shows this on the blackboard]. Silt comes down the river and makes a lovely, flat irrigated area, rich for growing things.

For the remainder of the lesson pupils worked quietly on their books and the teacher checked their work.



Figure 12. Pupil's hand-drawn map showing physical features of Africa.

Commentary

For a large part of this lesson pupils worked on constructing a map of Africa in their main lesson books. Hand drawn using a grid system, these were notable for their individuality and colour (see Figure 12). As with the other map-drawing exercises observed in this study, they combined accuracy with artistic expression. For the rest of the main lesson block attention focused on the Americas and individual project work.¹⁸

¹⁸ As in the previous case study pupils gave individual presentations on themes connected to the main lesson topic. These lessons were not observed.

4.2.2 Discussion

These vignettes illustrate further how Waldorf philosophy translates into classroom practice and the challenges it presents to the class teacher. Corroborating aspects of practice observed in the previous study (4.1), a clearer picture of the Waldorf approach emerges. Furthermore, learning discourse draws attention towards the way each teacher interprets the philosophy, indicating subtle differences in learning strategy and forms of geographical representation.

Drawing firstly on the common features of practice, both case studies highlight the effective use of descriptive, factually-based narrative to build images of people and nature and evoke a sense of place. Whilst the challenge involved in constructing and presenting such a holistic picture, and on a daily basis, should not be underestimated, these extracts provide clear evidence that pictorial images are, in both cases, skilfully created using a range of linguistic devices (e.g. word-pictures, personalisation, rhetorical questions etc.). Moreover, each teacher also attempts to integrate a more cognitive and reflective dimension into the learning discourse. With the combined high levels of pupil engagement, daily contact time and range of learning activities, the classroom experience for both teachers and pupils is particularly intensive.

Focusing on Teacher B, and as noted above, the salient feature of classroom discourse is the sustained dialogue with pupils. This has two main effects on the knowledge-building process. Firstly, it allows pupils to respond freely and spontaneously to the narrative, in so doing pursuing their own paths of understanding without intellectual schemata. In this sense, and in contrast to study 4.1, the cognitive and reflective dimension of learning is more pupil-led, emerging organically from the dialogue. However, at times, pupils' responses suggest that more conceptual guidance and direction is needed to give their ideas clearer geographical definition and meaning, and hence greater potential for application. Secondly, intensive dialogue with pupils introduces a collaborative dimension to knowledge-building. Consequently, although in keeping with Waldorf tradition knowledge construction is clearly orchestrated by the teacher (and consolidated by recall and application), by widening the sphere of reference the subjectivity of this process is, to a certain extent, reduced. The geographical picture is therefore drawn from a wider perspective.

As expected, the worldview constructed is both holistic and, drawing heavily naturalistic

imagery, idealized. Unlike the previous case study, however, it is not embedded in a colonial narrative. In this way the teacher remains focused on what he intended; to present 'a reality of the present'. Although this still emphasizes the primitive rather than the modern, reference is, nevertheless, made to human displacement and cultural integration. However, despite an awareness of what the respondent terms the 'Foucauldian positional thing', little attempt is made to represent reality from a non-European perspective. This is an issue raised by the teacher, who later admitted he 'would have liked to have given more of a picture of the people from their own viewpoint'. Concerns regarding the cultural positioning of knowledge were also expressed by pupils, as one pupil's feedback indicates: 'I wanted more details of peoples' life experiences and stories, down the mines and in the rainforest, and from their point of view.' ¹⁹

These views highlight the epistemological position and challenges involved in working with Waldorf's holistic and imaginative learning schema. Foremost, the process of imagining and building up the geographical picture as a holistic image relies heavily on the authority (and hence the centred position) of the narrator, whose task it is to draw the different objects together into a synthetic, integrated whole. To engage with the other viewpoint, and culturally re-position knowledge, involves, to some extent, destabilizing the imagination. Moreover, to build a holistic representation is essentially a process of selecting interesting details. Although many of the images constructed in these lessons are graphic and engaging, and draw heavily on stereotypes to encapsulate the different regions, or to give what the teacher calls an 'overview', as a form of representation this carries risks. Both the pedagogical impact of this approach as well as the inherent problem of selecting relevant material were highlighted by pupils' views on the main lesson content:

'I used to go to a state school. There you cover a lot more geography but not in much detail. Here you cover less but in much more depth.'

'I don't think we went into enough detail.'

'There's loads of stuff he didn't tell us about.'

'We didn't go into the poverty so much. I think we needed more on culture.'

¹⁹ These extracts of dialogue are from a short interview with a small group of pupils after the main lesson block.

In conclusion, whilst this case study provides further insight into the philosophy underpinning Waldorf geography and the challenges it presents to the class teacher, it also underlines the importance of the teacher's own personal schema. Returning to the notion of the child archetype, it is evident how each teacher creates a learning strategy based on his or her own image of the child and its educational needs. Whilst, based on the anthroposophical model, and as would be expected, the imaginative-pictorial element dominates, the extent to which the intellectual or "egoic-rational" element is developed differs. This can only be understood in relation to each teacher's deep-seated views on child development, particularly the role that intellectual learning should play in anthroposophy's spiritually-based model. For teacher A, this involves challenging what she describes as Waldorf's 'fear of the intellect', by developing pupils' powers of reflection and conceptualization, so they could 'translate information in a deliberate academic way'. For Teacher B, on the other hand, intellectual schemata, with their focus on analysis and literacy, are considered marginal to Waldorf's primary task of nourishing the imagination, and hence educating in freedom. Moreover, Teacher B's method of allowing more open exchanges with pupils broadened the worldview constructed. Whilst Teacher A stresses the need for academic discipline, Teacher B highlights the importance of dialogue. From lesson observation both of these elements emerge as necessary components of a balanced, integrated learning strategy, and, on reflection, both were underdeveloped in my own lessons. Further investigation of the discursive and cognitive dimensions of the Waldorf's imaginative approach continues below, with reference to the final class context in this empirical study.

4.3 Case Study 3: Context and Preview of Main Lesson

The final case study was conducted at a medium-sized school which runs to class 10. A well-established school with a developed anthroposophical culture, the respondent identified the school's strengths as its 'strong heart forces and sense of community'. Like the previous two participants, Teacher C, the class 7 teacher, had considerable experience, having completed a whole cycle before his present class, which he had taught since class 1. Originally a secondary school maths teacher he told me he had left the state sector to seek communities with 'less defined structures', that encourage what he described as 'personal initiative rather than conformity'. This had led to involvement in an anthroposophical Camphill community (for children with special needs), followed by re-training as a Waldorf class teacher. As this case study shows, the respondent's

scientific background had a significant impact on his approach to the main lesson.

Prior to observing lessons an interview with Teacher C explored his views on geographical knowledge and method for this age group, as well as the general aims of the main lesson. Whilst, as expected, he emphasized the need for vivid images, it was also stressed that to suit the consciousness of the (class 7) child knowledge needs to be concrete. In this sense the assumption was that by constructing the geographical picture descriptively, and through close attention to detail, it would appeal to both the intuitive and emerging rational elements of thought:

My guiding principle for geography in the middle school [classes 6 to 8] is that each pupil gets some sort of intuitive understanding of the continents and thereby a picture of the world we're living in, but it has to be a grounded, based on a clear understanding of what is where and what each region is like, both physically and culturally. From class 6 onwards the children live less in that dreamy world and closer to the earth, so they need to know its form and details. They really love the detail and want the facts. I think my way of working is more scientific than artistic. My background has something to do with that.

Giving no indication of applying a predefined conceptual schema or cognitive-based learning strategy suggested that Teacher C favoured an organic, pupil-led approach to knowledge-building. Whilst adopting the traditional threefold lesson structure, pupils' own viewpoints and research would therefore also be incorporated into the learning discourse:

I. *How do you intend to involve the class in knowledge-building?*

R. *Well, it should be more than me telling them and them regurgitating it. Although I'll give an overview of each region, it will be them raising the issues and hopefully asking questions. There are always openings for discussion that arise during the lesson. I also want them to do independent study.*

R. *So it's important that lessons are not too prescriptive?*

I. *Yes. I don't have them copying from the blackboard and I encourage them to read different texts. Some will just copy, but others will adapt it and make it their own.*

As shown in the previous study (4.2), knowledge constructed through a combination of narrative and open dialogue with pupils generates a more diverse representation, one less dependent on the teacher's subjective viewpoint. The collaborative process of building a holistic geographical picture from multiple perspectives was also an approach preferred by Teacher C. This raises issues regarding participation in classroom discourse and construction of the geographical imagination:

I. *My lesson observations have shown a tendency to present geography in a historical context. Is it your intention to do that?*

R. *That was more my approach when we did geography of the Americas.. focusing on*

explorers of the New World and the impulse to find out what was beyond European boundaries. But they're town children and awake to what's in the news, so they want to explore themes relevant today. They are more aware of current politics and it's right to discuss these things. They want that. So I won't go into history so much.

I. *So it's important to present a broad view?*

R. *Yes. Education is about making links in the mind.. drawing on other main lessons, politics, news, travel, as well as pupils' life experiences and research, rather than a blinkered view on one topic.*

I. *Does this counteract the tendency to rely on stereotypes of indigenous peoples?*

R. *Well, that's always an issue, but if the children are doing research and using their imaginations freely in writing exercises, then we can build on different perspectives, rather than me just putting a picture there. Besides, in this modern age so much is merging with traditional cultures. The picture is complex and changing.*

Emerging clearly from these initial exchanges was Teacher C's intention to encourage dialogue in the knowledge-building process. As shown below, this dimension of classroom discourse had a significant impact on pupil engagement and the worldview constructed .

4.3.1 Lesson Content and Analysis

The following vignettes draw on classroom discourse from the opening sequence of lessons of a four-week block on Asia. The teacher's intention was to break the continent down into regions and focus on each in turn, beginning with central Asia and the Middle East (the focus of lessons in this study), then moving eastwards to southern Asia and the Far East. Pupils played a significant part in researching and presenting information on different countries within each region.

Teacher C described his class as 'being more interested in each other than lesson content, so still needing the teacher's ego to separate social activity from the academic.' However, although the occasional reinforcement of authority was necessary, like the previous classes the atmosphere was generally relaxed and informal, with no evidence of problems with classroom management. Relationships between teacher and pupils were firmly established and intuitive, allowing time for chat and occasional diversions from lesson content. Compared to the other classes in this study, pupils' accents were mainly regional, indicating a wider variety of social backgrounds.²⁰ 18 pupils of this class of 26 had been with the class since class 1.

²⁰ The teacher explained that whereas the parent body of his previous class had been drawn towards the school mainly for philosophical reasons, his present class attended 'for a greater range of educational needs.'

Pupils were seated individually at wooden desks, arranged in rows facing the blackboard. A large wall map of Asia adjoined a carefully drawn map of the continent on the blackboard.

Following Waldorf method, the first twenty minutes of each lesson began with a sequence of rituals and warm-up activities:

- teacher greets each pupil with a handshake
- informal chat (focused on forthcoming geography projects and/or class camp)
- register
- light candle and stand for school verse (whole class)
- birthday verses (occasional)
- poem or song related to main lesson theme (whole class)

The remainder of each two hour lesson then focused on the main lesson theme. As before, the following extracts of classroom discourse were selected to highlight pupil involvement in knowledge-building and the worldview constructed. Analysis proceeds in a running commentary, firstly by identifying general patterns in the discourse and then through focus on its salient features. Some comparisons with the previous case studies are made as the analysis progresses, although this is developed in more detail in the concluding discussion. The system of notation is the same as before.

Lesson 1, a short lesson following assembly, began with an introduction to Asia. The teacher instructed the class to make a sketch of the world in one minute, drawn from memory.

This led to a short question and answer sequence:

T [Standing in front of the class] *What are the continents?*
[Pupils shout out their names]

T *Why are they different? Remember class 6 geology.*

P *The plates are shifting around.*

T *And what did that cause?*

P *Crevasses!*

T *Be more specific. I wouldn't call them that.*

P *Sea trenches!*

T *Yes, and these are the boundaries between continents. Now look at the map. Where are the boundaries of Asia?*

P *Europe and Asia moved together and created those mountains.*

T *The Urals [indicating on wall map]. So if you look at the world map, you can see how the continents fit together and their boundaries. First, we're going to look at Asia's physical make-up and then its people. We've already looked at old Indian and Arabic*

cultures, but Asia is about the future, so we need to look at what it's like nowadays.²¹
P *In China you can only have one child!* [comment incites chatter] // (1)

After allocating countries for project presentations and giving guidance on how pupils should do this, the teacher gave instructions for a clay modelling exercise:²²

T *Now we're going to make a model of Asia. Get into groups of four, then look at the map and find where the high land is. Colour shows height. When you've done the mountains put in the major rivers and lakes. Plan it out. (2)*

Without further instruction pupils began moulding the clay. Very little guidance was given during this exercise. By the end of the lesson each group had produced a model. No comment on these was made until the following day.

The following day's recall (**lesson 2**) began with pupils instructed to sketch a map of Asia showing the adjoining continents. The teacher then placed a selection of clay models on the blackboard adjacent to the wall-map and his own hand-drawn version (see figure 13). Referring to these three different representations he then began to talk about the relief of Asia:



Figure 13. Three representations of Asia.

T *Ok ladies and gentlemen, I now present Asia! Yesterday we talked about relief. What does it mean? // Look, the colours on this map show us relief, and this huge area of*

²¹ This refers to main lesson themes in previous years.

²² As in the previous study, pupils gave presentations on different countries within the continent.

high land you built up yesterday is much higher than anywhere in Britain. Look at how the rivers drain away into this massive area of flat land. These are the great contrasts of the Asian landmass. Now indicate on your maps the Himalayas and the rivers you discovered yesterday. (1)

The teacher then began a presentation on Russia:

T Look how Russia spreads between Asia and Europe. It's the biggest country in Europe! You can get a hundred Britains in that area. If you catch a train from Moscow to Vladivostok it takes six days and passes through eleven time zones! You can break the country down into three main landscapes. The cold north is a vast, bleak treeless area like a desert. It's called Tundra. Then further south the trees begin to grow in a huge area of coniferous forest. This called Taiga. Below this is a vast expanse of open space where the grasslands roll and roll without hedges. These are the fertile Steppes. // There was one famous person called Stalin who ruled over this land. In 1925 he was leader of the communists and maintained his authority in a cruel way, sending millions away to Siberian death camps. Imagine being there where it goes down to minus 40°C! After the war Russia was anti-West, until 1991 when the Cold War ended. Any questions?

PA You forgot about religion!

T Well, this was frowned upon in communism.

P Didn't they make a road from the bones of prisoners?

PA I'll give you a 'C' for your presentation. You should have got your facts right! (2)

For the remainder of the lesson pupils made an accurate copy of the teacher's relief map of Asia. (3)

Commentary

At this stage it is helpful to identify the salient features of Teacher B's method. Similar to the previous examples, this relies heavily on descriptive, empirically-based narrative interspersed with sequences of questioning and answering, followed by independent work i.e. map drawing and modelling. In this respect the pattern of learning discourse reflects Waldorf's threefold rhythmic method of recall, presentation and giving instructions (for application). This process of knowledge-building is clearly shown, for example, in the three different parts of lesson 2.

Emerging from this framework, however, are noticeable features of method and spatial representation. Firstly, the absence of any significant dialogue in the knowledge-building process. Contrary to the teacher's indications, learning discourse, up to this point, remains closely controlled. Secondly, a powerful pedagogical moment. This arises in lesson 2, when the concept of relief is elicited through reference to the pupils' own clay models (2/1). In this way the key idea or concept emerges organically as a culmination of activity that, during the previous lesson, directly engaged the body or will forces. By drawing on three different forms of visual representation in the same moment meaning is

consolidated.

The following day's recall (lesson 3) began with a brief question and answer sequence to elicit facts about the Russian landscape. This was followed by a writing exercise:

T Now I want you to imagine you are standing at a viewpoint overlooking a vast area of the Steppes. Describe the scene in as much detail as you can, but only the scene. It's not about you but about the landscape. What can you see? You have five minutes. (1)

Following this exercise the teacher began a presentation on Arabia:

T Fifteen hundred years ago the people of this dry, bare and barren area were nomads.. wanderers called Bedouins living in tribes and looking for food. One of the main starting points for the Arab empire was the inspirational leader Mohammed, who claimed that God had spoken to him and told him how people should live. From this point, Arabic culture and learning spread over a vast area. Look at this Arabic writing [writes example on blackboard]. It moves from right to left. // Arabia is now a wealthy place built on reserves of oil and gas, with wonderful cities built in the desert. But there's a huge difference between desert and city people, although certain traditions are still kept. It's so hot people have to cover their skin a lot. (2)

Pupil B then gave a short talk on Israel. After presenting some factual information the class began asking questions:

P Why don't Jews eat dairy after mid-day?

PB I don't know.

P Why are babies circumcised? [laughter] //

T If you look at the geography of Israel, on the edge of Asia, there's a rift where the landmass has dropped. So the river is lower than the sea and runs into a lake. The water's continually evaporating and very salty. You can float on it and even read a newspaper!

P You can sit under another person and float.

P Do you get free salt with your chips then?

T Yes, and the area's so dry it preserved the scrolls. Israel was created in 1948..

P For the Jews after the war.

T But it's mostly Moslems in that region, so there's a lot of tension. We'll have a closer look at that. (3)

Pupils were then instructed to label physical features on their maps and write a descriptive, factually-based introduction to Asia. Information was provided in a hand-out. (4)

Lesson 4 began with a recital of an Arabic poem. This was followed by a general knowledge test to recount factual information on Arabia. A short question and answer sequence then recalled contrasts in Israel's landscape. (1)

Presentations were then led by pupils. Pupil C gave a brief portrait of Lebanon, presenting factual information organised thematically (e.g. flag, climate, population etc.). Invited to ask questions, one pupil raised the issue of conflict:

P *Why is there an army? //*

PC *I'm not sure*

T *In this whole area there's a lot of unrest and bad feeling towards Israel. Many don't think it should be there, and Israel is surrounded by Arab countries, so it's under constant threat. There are huge walls built to separate people and restrict movement.. guards and look-out posts. At seventeen you have to join the army. Imagine that!*

Pupil D then gave a portrait of Saudi Arabia. This inspired questions on the nature of government:

P *So why are there no women in power?*

PD *I don't know.*

T [Drawing Saudi Arabian flag] *Islam is a political system and judgements are made according to the Koran. Like in the Middle Ages, when we had trial by fire, they have sharia law. They can have their hands cut off or be whipped. Women do not have the same rights as men. Their faces are covered and they have to wear long robes, and they can only do certain jobs.*

P *Tourists have to dress like that too.*

T *Yes, but we should also remember that things aren't all dark. (2)*

The teacher then instructed pupils to write a brief, factually-based account of 'what it's like in Arabia', illustrated with a picture of the Dome of the Rock, emphasizing that it should be 'full of colour' (see figure 14). (3)

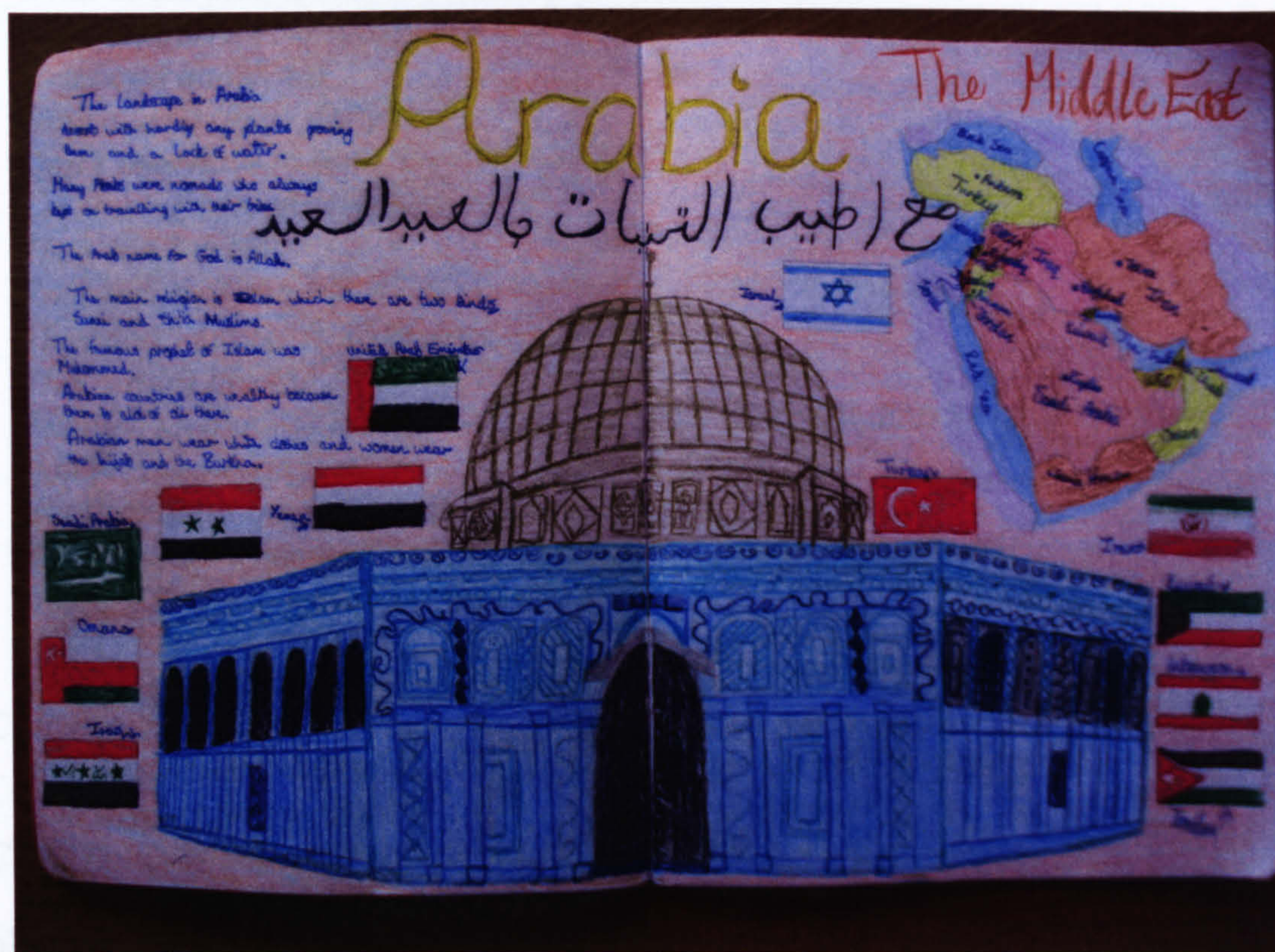


Figure 14. Example of pupil's completed work.

Commentary

The salient features of these lessons are the more versatile control of classroom discourse

and, consequently, the more diverse representation. Whilst the teacher's own narrative remains uninterrupted (3/2), inviting pupils to present their own information leads to sequences of open and spontaneous dialogue (e.g. 3/3). Interestingly, this shifts the emphasis towards contemporary issues of government (e.g. 4/2). However, the core component of the geographical picture, and the one recalled and recorded, is the content of the Teacher's presentation. Although the pictorial images, or sense of place, evoked by the narrative is perhaps not as vivid as the previous case studies, description is nevertheless graphic and engaging, drawing pupils' attention to both the natural and political landscapes. Noticeable in the following lessons is how the discursive element is intensified.

During the following day's recall (lesson 5) the teacher drew pupils' attention to the flag of Saudi Arabia:

- T *I want you to draw the flag of Saudi Arabia. [Two minutes later] Can someone tell me what it means?*
- P *There is no God but Allah.*
- T *What about that, is it ok?*
- P *It's a bit narrow minded!*
- P *Strict and intolerant.*
- T *How does it affect daily life?*
- P *Don't they have to pray five times a day?*
- T *Yes, facing Mecca. Anything else?*
- P *They can't drink.*
- T *Possession of alcohol is like possession of a Class A drug here.*
- P *They don't eat pork. They think it's dirty.*
- P *That's a bit like the Jews, isn't it?*
- T *Imagine yourselves in the position of women. What would it be like?*
- P *You'd have no self-esteem.*
- P *But they don't question it. It's just normal.*
- T *That would be hard for us. What about wearing the veil?*
- P *Indoors they wear normal clothes.*
- T *What about the laws? We only hear about the nasty bits.*
- P *That woman called a teddy bear "Mohammed!"*
- PC *It's stupid to be punished for something you don't believe in.*
- T *But they uphold the dignity of the human-being, not teddies.*
- P *And they whip people if they don't agree to get married.*
- PC *We're not whipped if we call a teddy bear 'Jesus'. (1)*

Following another pupil presentation (on Abu Dhabi), pupils were asked to read out their cameos of Arabia. The class were then instructed to draw a political map of the Middle East, paying attention to 'colour, accuracy and labelling.' (2)

During the first part of lesson 6 pupils were asked to draw a freehand map from memory:

- T *You have five minutes to draw a map of the Middle East. Label the countries, capitals and seas.*
- P *I can't do it! I don't know what it looks like.*
- T *Then make notes on what you know. We've all got different ways of learning. If you're not a visual learner then you have to work at it and develop the skills you don't have.*
[Five minutes later]
It's interesting to see these different maps. Someone give me a country.
- P *Lebanon.*
- T [Drawing outline of Lebanon on blackboard] *Now a country that borders it?*
- P *Israel.*
- T [Continuing drawing] *And a country next to Israel? What's this bit called? Tell me something about it.*
- P *The Gulf?*
- T *Yes, and what goes through it?*
- P *Oil tankers!*
- T *When was oil needed by society?*
- P *When we used cars and chemicals.*
- P *Did everyone become rich?*
- T *Some governments are quite benevolent.*
- P *Shouldn't they plan for the future now, for when there's no oil?*
- T *From deserts to tourism. That's happening now. // (1)*

Following recall, Pupil E gave a presentation on Iraq. Having presented information on climate, relief and ethnicity, attention turned towards the invasion:

- PE *The U.S. supported him [Saddam Hussein] and then killed him. It was hypocritical to do that.*
- P *But didn't he have weapons?*
- PE *They never found any.*
- P *And loads of look-alikes!*
- T *Saddam did some nasty things to the Kurds in the north.*
- PF *Didn't we do things to the tribes in Scotland? //*
- P *What's the landscape like?*
- P *Mostly desert.*
- T *There are two rivers going down into the Persian Gulf here. We studied them in class 5.*
- P *Didn't he live in a hole for two years? [laughter]*
- P *Is there anything good about Iraq?*
- T *There are many ancient sites and one day you might go there. (2) //*
Now I want you to tell me what it's like to live in one of these places. Choose one of the following scenarios and imagine what it's like to be there: [writes on blackboard] 'a woman living in Saudi Arabia', 'an old person who has seen many changes', 'an Arab living next to Israel'. I want you to describe the area you live in and what you think about your situation. (3)

Commentary

Open dialogue shifts the emphasis from the teacher's narrative (e.g. listening and absorbing information) to a more reflective learning discourse, exploring the cultural differences between East and West (5/1) and the moral complexity of war (6/2). In this

sense dialogue gravitates towards ideological issues surrounding the geographical imagination and pupils' different viewpoints. Furthermore, in an attempt to challenge the Eurocentric (and essentially male) worldview, pupils are encouraged to imagine different perspectives (6/3). Although this more open, critical discourse invites the occasional frivolous comment, through skilful management of the dialogue focus is maintained.

The following day's recall (lesson 7) began with a question and answer sequence. This led to discussion of the war in the Middle East:

T *Tell me what you remember about Iraq.*

P *It's a young country with a population of 28 million.*

T *Very good!*

P *There's a war going on.*

T *Why?*

P *The English and Americans are against.. who is it?*

P *The Taliban.*

T *Let's be clear. There are reasons for taking up a gun.*

P *They thought he had weapons of mass destruction.*

T [Writes on blackboard: WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION] *What does that mean?*

PP *Nuclear! Biological! Gas!*

T *Yes, to kill people instantly.*

PE *He's dead now, so why are they still there?*

P *Because of the oil.*

T *There can be a lot of unrest when you get different races. Who are they?*

P *The Kurds.*

T *They live up near Turkey. We've created borders so they have to live in Iraq. There are two tribes of Moslems.. the Sunnis and Shiites. They see Iraq being controlled in different ways. It's called 'separatism' [writes word on blackboard]. In my opinion if the allies withdrew now there would be a civil war.*

PE *It's pointless.. just killing people.*

PF *But we're just trying to help really.*

PE *What happens in the East has nothing to do with us.*

PF *If we leave they'll attack us!*

T [writes TERRORISM] *What's terrorism got to do with this area?*

P *They're extremists.*

T *Why?*

PG *To sacrifice themselves.*

P *Why?*

PG *For God.*

T *There is no God but Allah. An extreme statement would motivate terrorism.*

PE *It's gone full circle. Weren't the crusades the same thing?*

T *Western people imposing themselves on the East.*

P *Why are people racist? That's the main issue.*

T *Time for a spelling test.*

P *But this is more educational than a spelling test! (1)*

After the spelling test pupils were told to indicate various cities on their political map. A pupil then gave a presentation on Iran, which led to a discussion of the differences between a secular and a religious state. Following this, stories written the previous day

were read aloud. The teacher then summarized by commenting on the value of different perspectives: *'Lots and lots of pictures from someone else's shoes. We get used to our British way of life, but if we see things from other points of view we can prevent racism.'* Pupils then copied their accounts into their main lesson books. (2)

Commentary

Allowing the dialogue to run freely elicits different viewpoints. However, statements also emerge that draw, in a broader sense, on the interdependence of cultures in the modern world, and the reality of war. From these exchanges complex moral issues arise regarding the geographical imagination and which pupils are keen to discuss.

4.3.2 Discussion

As with the previous studies, these vignettes highlight both the salient features of the Waldorf approach as well as individual interpretation of method and forms of geographical representation. Whilst the threefold lesson structure and the importance of classroom discourse for knowledge-building, as opposed to textual information, is clearly illustrated, in this case study attention is drawn towards the teacher's use of dialogue to explore the main lesson theme. This has a direct bearing on both the worldview constructed and the interpretive process, highlighting the potential for differences in learning strategy, pupil involvement and representation within Waldorf's general schema

Although in the early part of the sequence (lessons 2 and 3), learning discourse focuses primarily on the teacher's narrative, it then shifts towards the pupils' knowledge and opinions, in the form of individual project presentations and sequences of dialogue drawing on their curiosity and viewpoints. It is these open exchanges that emerge as the salient feature of classroom discourse. Whilst recall, teacher-led presentations and the application parts of the lessons aim to give knowledge clearer definition (e.g. in a factual or descriptive, concrete form), open dialogue invites a more reflective and critical interpretation of its deeper meaning. In this respect, and more so than the previous case studies, classroom discourse probes cultural and political attitudes to non-European life, drawing on pupils' feelings and perceptions. This raises important issues regarding both the pedagogical and representational aspects of the learning process.

Firstly, through open dialogue, what could be described as the underlying structural or form-building element of knowledge (its preconceived conceptual framework or imaginative-pictorial dimension) is, although temporarily, replaced with a learning

discourse that is more spontaneous, fluid and collaborative. In this respect knowledge is no longer purely a construction of the teacher's imagination, or defined within a pre-determined cognitive schema, but is generated organically as a form of collective imagination that grows from moment to moment, according to what Teacher C defines as 'links in the mind.' Moreover, this happens in an immediate way without the transformative process of sleep which, in so doing, blurs the distinction between imaginative-pictorial and reflective modes of thought. It should also be noted, however, that a more discursive approach also raises issues regarding inclusion. Whilst these transcripts of lesson discourse highlight pupil engagement and the vibrancy of classroom talk, it should be noted that they do not include the whole class. This was acknowledged by the teacher: 'Whereas bookwork gives an indication of individual understanding, the vocal element will exclude the quiet ones.'

Secondly, as highlighted in the previous study, and by Teacher C, open dialogue also has an important impact on the worldview constructed. Whilst the teacher presents the framework of the geographical imagination, by 'pulling out the themes and cultural styles of each region', the imagination, at certain moments, develops by drawing on different perspectives. Although the scene is set by the teacher's description of natural regions, and by drawing attention towards different nation-states, the picture then deepens through class discussion of cultural differences and geo-political conflict. In this sense the representation steers way from idealized images and stereotypes of indigenous life to themes of contemporary relevance and cultural tension.

As with the previous studies, this sequence of lessons therefore highlights further how the two archetypes framing the Waldorf approach to geography are individually interpreted and inform classroom practice. Foremost, noticeable in this case study (4.3.1) is the emphasis given to the cognitive element of the knowledge-building process - the attempt to engage pupils in reflective thinking and detailed writing. However, unlike Teacher A, no attempt is made to adopt an intellectual schema or teach a conceptual framework for comprehension i.e. such as "thinking skills". Moreover, whilst Teacher C's approach relies less on imaginative transaction, imaginative responses are encouraged in other ways. This becomes apparent in the written, interpretive exercises when pupils are asked to construct cameos of countries and life 'from someone else's shoes.' Additionally, as noted above, the worldview constructed resists the tendency to present the far away as the long ago. As such, the historical, Eurocentric narrative underlying the Waldorf

curriculum's holistic notion of 'geo' is largely avoided. To a certain extent this rendering of Waldorf philosophy, with its focus on clear geo-political definition, grounding in empiricism, and attempt to construct knowledge from different perspectives, reflects Teacher C's more scientific viewpoint.

In conclusion, Teacher C's approach to the main lesson demonstrates a versatile control of discourse to construct knowledge and engage pupils in diverse thinking activity.

Whilst framed on the traditional threefold lesson structure and its distinctive pattern of discourse, within this general schema a geographical picture is developed that draws on a wide range of meanings, engaging pupils in various modes of thought (e.g. data recall, imaginative-picturing, graphical representation, making moral judgements etc.).

Furthermore, whilst the subjective and repetitive element of knowledge-building is upheld through recall and application, free expression of ideas is encouraged through open dialogue. Significantly, this aspect of the learning discourse did not go unappreciated, as one pupil emphasized:

I used to go to a state school and it was very restrictive. I felt I wasn't free to be expressive. The most used words were 'you can't', but here it's what you can. We have lots of discussions and express our opinions. It's more open and creative. You're not chained up and the teacher doesn't just drone on.

However, this study also highlights the effect that teacher-pupil relations, as the social context for classroom dialogue, has on the knowledge construction and transfer.

Comparing the classroom discourse in this study with the previous one (4.2), it is apparent how Teacher B was significantly more challenged during the exchanges.

4.4 Conclusion

These three case studies, drawing on extended lesson sequences and various discourses, give further insight into how Waldorf's holistic philosophy translates into classroom practice. Foremost, they illustrate different interpretations of the educational philosophy, providing additional evidence that the notion of a standardized 'Waldorf method' should be viewed with caution. Rather, each practice, whilst based firmly on Waldorf principles, is highly personalized. Moreover, and to varying degrees, each approach emerges as an effective as a method of learning. However, within the general schema of shared principles, lesson structure and main lesson themes, each learning discourse highlights the challenges of working with Waldorf's holistic framework, pointing towards deeper

issues underlying its guiding philosophy.

As indicated in the theoretical part of this thesis, Waldorf pedagogy and curriculum knowledges are inspired by Steiner's metaphysically-oriented worldview, which, epistemologically, attaches great significance to the intuitive-imaginative realm. This raises important questions concerning both learning method and knowledge content. As shown in these case studies, sequences of descriptive narrative that build up vivid pictures of people and places are a key feature of the learning discourse, engaging pupils foremost on an imaginative level without being confined by intellectual schemata or learning strategies based on the preconceived notion of "thinking skills". Instead, the primary intention is to allow pupils' thinking to develop intuitively in relation to the narrated content. Although the imaginative quality of teachers' presentations varies, these transcripts clearly illustrate attempts to engage pupils in such an organic learning process. However, emerging from the three different contexts are different applications of the imaginative principle, which impacts on both learning strategy and the form of the holistic (geographical) representation. These two dimensions of the knowledge-building process require further consideration.

Regarding method, all three teachers use discourse in versatile ways to engage pupils in thinking about the world, adopting different strategies to integrate imaginative and rational modes of thought. Whilst recall and bookwork are the standard procedures used to elicit and apply knowledge, other methods are also used to stimulate reflective thinking and clarify ideas through a more conscious interpretive process. Whereas Teacher A draws more consistently on preconceived interpretive schemata (for example, by instructing pupils to make descriptive 'statements'), Teachers' B and C allowed discourse to evolve more freely. This allows pupils more freedom to form their own verbal-analytical responses to lesson content, which has a direct bearing on both the direction the discourse follows and pupils' cognitive engagement. For one approach, therefore, outcomes are closely regulated; for the other, pupils have more freedom to interpret. Particularly noticeable is how more open discourse shifts the emphasis towards the pupils, allowing a more collaborative process that builds on pupils' questions and personal judgements. From the teacher's viewpoint, however, this can also be difficult to manage.

Without a predefined specification or conceptual schema, Waldorf teachers are free to

develop their own integrated learning strategies. From a wider perspective, these resonate with pedagogical theories, considered above, that call for imaginative rather than intellectually-defined approaches to learning (for example, the viewpoints of Dewey, Eisner, Whitehead and Healy), as well as educational ideas inspired by wisdom traditions, with their focus on the intuitive realm (for example, Hart 2007). For instance, parallels can be drawn between the methods used by teachers in these case studies and Hart's naturalistic view of learning, which claims that intelligence is cultivated through the interplay of intuitive and analytical or conceptually-framed modes of thought - what he calls the "analytical-intuitive dialectic". Referring back to Hart's ideas we see, in these extracts of lesson talk, for example, clear instances when the 'analytic frame[s] problems for the intuitive, translate[s] vision into form, [and] help[s] to interpret and deepen results' (2007: 77). Drawing again on the different interpretations of method, however, whilst various moments of knowledge-building indicate what Hart calls a 'deeply integrated and fluid process', attention is drawn to details of the "dialectic". Although lesson discourse evokes intuitive responses (in the form of mental-picturing) whilst withholding from explicit interpretive schemata, more clearly-defined and analytical modes of interpretation are generally developed in ways appropriate to the imaginative process, and with varying degrees of rigour. Teacher A, for example, encourages pupils to re-visualize scenes and construct their own geographical pictures. In this example maps are also used to give the geographical imagination a clearer, more concrete, definition. Albeit in different ways, both of these methods use verbal-analytical schemata to "translate vision into form". Teacher's B and C, on the other hand, apart from allowing the analytical element to emerge organically through dialogue, rely heavily on factual recall as the basis for descriptive recording. However, the salient feature of method that emerges in all three case studies, including previous lesson observations (3.2 and 3.4), is the way the cognitive element is closely integrated with the imaginative. In this sense there is a clearly-defined space for what Whitehead calls 'freedom in the presence of knowledge' (1967: 30).

As shown above, Waldorf's view of the intellectual dimension of learning is embedded in anthroposophy's spiritual image of the child. Nevertheless, these studies clearly show that whilst Steiner's holistic archetype is the basis for an imaginative pedagogy which excludes certain strategies of cognitive-learning for the pre-adolescent child (for example, problem-solving), views on the place of explicit academic thinking (reasoning, critique, causality, applying conceptual frameworks etc.) within this general schema

vary.²³

Furthermore, these empirical studies offer further evidence with which to reconsider my original question concerning the potential problem of the cognitive element of the Waldorf approach. Whilst certain issues emerged through analysis of my own practice (3.2), subsequent classroom observation has, however, made any definitive judgement on this aspect of learning difficult. Instead, I would argue that classroom discourse, although highlighting moments when the interpretive and critical element of learning could have been more rigorously developed without undermining the image content, shows that pupils are engaged on a cognitive level appropriate to their age. For the most part, classes were held by a learning discourse engaging pupils' emerging powers of comprehension without resort to abstract forms of conceptualization. In this respect these case studies present convincing evidence of an approach that combines both imaginative and rational elements into an effective learning discourse. Ultimately, however, opinions on the cognitive dimension of learning depend on personal views regarding education's wider function and goals. This is discussed further in my concluding discussion.

These examples of practice, drawing on a similar curriculum theme (continental geography), also raise important issues regarding the worldview presented to the Waldorf pupil. Whilst the common feature of spatial representation is its holism, and, as a synthetic imaginative-picture, its power to engage, structural features of the geographical pictures vary. As shown above, Waldorf's 'holistic geo-graphia' closely follows the tradition of natural determinism, relying heavily on the notion of the natural region as a framework to build synthetic images of people, cultures and place. Furthermore, the tendency to idealize is further compounded by the evolutionary framework, or notion of development, at the heart of Waldorf's integrated curriculum (emerging in class 7 as the theme of "discovery"). With these spatial and historical impulses combining to form a powerful, culturally-positioned geographical discourse, the worldviews constructed lean heavily towards the premodern, particularly in their portrayal of indigenous people 'at one' with nature. Furthermore, these essentially Eurocentric representations are, as colonial narratives, ideologically contentious (Driver 2001). However, although naturalistic images and cultural stereotypes are important elements of the discourse presented here, they do not determine it. Teacher C, for example, does not adopt a historical narrative, focusing instead on the nation-state and

²³ Obviously this would not be the case for instruction in mathematics.

drawing on issues of power, conflict and displacement. This teacher also considers the notion that worldviews are culturally positioned, and, as such, the need to draw on other perspectives. Hence, although the imaginative impulse has a powerful impact on the way space is represented, it does not, and, arguably, should not, exclude more critical interpretation. However, as this empirical study shows, to achieve this requires a more reflective and collaborative approach to knowledge-building; one that allows sequences of open dialogue with the free exchange of viewpoints. This is highlighted, both by my own lessons and those observed in this study, as a necessary condition for a balanced approach to learning within the Waldorf schema.

In conclusion, this empirical study as a whole highlights important aspects of Waldorf philosophy and its application as an imaginative learning discourse for geography. Whilst areas of ambiguity have been identified, the essential aim of the Waldorf approach - to engage pupils on an intuitive and imaginative level - is legitimized by its own metaphysical framework and educational goals. Although, with regards to geography, this leads to a focus on the uniqueness of peoples and places defined primarily by the notion of natural regions and, as is commonly the case, within a historical narrative or context, this is arguably an important part of the imaginative transaction.

Notwithstanding the challenges of constructing and conveying such a pictorial knowledge in practice, this type of holistic representation will, in an existential sense, always appeal to the human psyche. Furthermore, this clearly resonates with geography's wider enduring concern for the non-rational and pictorial; to encapsulate and inspire what Cosgrove, for example, describes as the cosmopolitan quest for 'totality, unity and order' (2005: 25). As this thesis highlights, however, the question remains whether or how this holistic, pictorial element can be integrated with a more rational discourse (Short 2000), both in curriculum knowledge and, more widely, in geographical thought. To achieve such a balance is the fundamental challenge confronting the Waldorf teacher when faced with the task of the geography main lesson.

Conclusion

This exploration of the Waldorf approach to geography raises a number of issues concerning both the benefits to pupils as well as the challenges confronting teachers working with Steiner's educational philosophy. While some aspects of this schema, such as its discursive approach, emphasis on whole class teaching and strong teacher authority, resonate with traditional forms of mainstream practice (of the 'chalk and talk' type), other aspects, embedded in Steiner's holistic worldview, are distinctly Waldorf. Drawing on the evidence of this investigation it is possible to make an informed evaluation of both the philosophical framework underpinning this approach and the potential contribution it could make to the mainstream. However, an assessment of the Waldorf schema and its wider application has to begin with its unique philosophy and the immersed position of the class teacher.

As shown throughout this thesis, the salient feature of Waldorf philosophy is its explicit metaphysical framework. Whilst teachers are not required to follow Steiner's spiritual path, as its metaphysical framework anthroposophy nevertheless permeates Waldorf education, and on a number of levels. Foremost, and the foundation of teacher education and pedagogy, as well as the basis for subject knowledge, is Steiner's understanding of the child's cognitive development. Based on this archetype the essential requirement for class teaching is a sensitivity to the "soul-aesthetic" or feeling realm of thinking and learning, which, in the lesson context, depends on the ability to transform knowledge into an imaginative-pictorial form. This supports the Waldorf view that access to the unconscious, creative self, or the individual, spiritual element of the human being, is achieved indirectly through non-analytical pedagogical discourse.

Furthermore, the different classroom discourses encountered during this research present strong evidence that building up a pictorial knowledge through the verbal description of people and places is, if skilfully handled, a powerful medium of knowledge transaction. Not only does this question the need for predefined or text-based knowledges for pre-adolescent classes, it also challenges the assumption that pupils of this age need to be taught how to think. Extracts of lesson talk clearly show that pupils will respond intuitively to imaginative narrative, and, in so doing, generate their own rational thought-forms to achieve understanding (for example, by constructing questions to establish

causal relationships). By withholding from intellectual schemata pupils are therefore allowed the freedom to interpret the world by drawing on their innate cognitive ability. As an organic learning strategy framed on the interplay of imaginative and rational discourses, and attuned to the child's natural rhythms of waking and sleeping, this resonates with a number of alternative views on pedagogy, such as those of Eisner and Hart considered above. The social benefits of such a communicative method, which builds close bonds between teacher and pupils, is also a distinctive feature of each learning context in this study.

However, whilst developing the narrative and imaginative element of learning may seem an obvious antidote to the more intellectually focused method of the mainstream, with its generally brisker cognitive pace,¹ this study also shows that the Waldorf approach, as a learning strategy and form of representation, can be both challenging and problematic. This can only be understood in relation to the philosophical framework underpinning the knowledge-building process.

Firstly, working without predefined cognitive-based learning goals, assessment strategies or detailed curriculum specifications, class teachers are free to develop their own learning method, although within the threefold lesson structure. A key principle of Steiner's vision of the freely operating class teacher, this places special emphasis on individual teachers, their capabilities and subjective viewpoints. Consequently, whilst the classroom discourses recorded in the course of this research were generally imaginative and engaging, they also demonstrate different interpretations of the Waldorf schema. In particular, they highlight the personal challenges involved in achieving balance in learning. In this respect, they show the difficulty involved in developing, within the framework of Waldorf's philosophy of the imagination, the intellectual or more reflective and critical dimension of learning. Furthermore, it is only through the skilful management of classroom discourse, rather than the implementation of any theoretically-defined procedure, that the imaginative and rational dimensions are successfully integrated. This has emerged as a key requirement for effective instruction, particularly for preadolescent pupils with their emerging faculty for comprehension. Steiner's original dictum that Waldorf pedagogy should nurture a "living intellect" is, as such, arguably the most

¹ This does not imply that the mainstream approach to geography is universal or that it is not, in practice, interpreted and contested.

challenging aspect of main lesson practice. Teachers' personal views on academic forms of learning and their place in the Waldorf schema emerge as the critical factor in determining how this is done.

As noted above, however, any evaluation of Waldorf practice has to consider the philosophical position that underpins it, particularly its educational goals. While differences in classroom practice indicate the importance of the interpretive element in Waldorf philosophy, this also reflects deep-seated resistance to the standardization of practice, through either theory (within the Waldorf community) or the bureaucratic procedure of lesson inspection i.e. through OfSTED. Rather, and following Steiner's intention, the view is that practice should develop freely in a way attuned to each class context, drawing on the intuitive relationship between teacher and pupils, which includes the metaphysical impulses of karma. Based on this belief system the assumption is held that the right approach will be established through the dialectic of classroom practice and teacher learning, leading to deeper, personal insights into the nature of the child. According to Steiner, rather than through the formalisation of learning goals or the implementation of a prescribed method, effective practice depends primarily on the teacher's capacity to deepen his or her knowledge of the child through the framework of anthroposophy. The unique organization of the Waldorf class system is also significant.²

Given both the philosophy underpinning practice and the distinct context of learning, the possibility of transferring aspects of Waldorf pedagogy to the mainstream (an agenda considered by Woods et al 2005) therefore becomes problematic. Furthermore, questions regarding the intellectual rigour of the Waldorf approach have to also take into consideration the ongoing adjustment and development of each teacher's method. What may therefore appear from observation as either positive or problematic areas of pedagogy are, in reality, embedded in the unique, evolving context of the Waldorf class. Not only does this further problematize the potential for the transference of skills from Waldorf to the mainstream, it makes an external evaluation of learning strategy difficult.

Secondly, inherent in the discourse of knowledge-building is the construction of a distinct worldview. Whilst Steiner's holistic image of the child is the foundation for a unique

² This was evident in the empirical study. More experienced teachers, and those who had been with their class for long periods, were generally able to teach with a more relaxed authority and hence with more fluidity and less tension. The intuitive realm of practice is, however, elusive and difficult to specify.

pedagogy, his holistic worldview leaves a deep impression on the geographical imagination. Although Steiner's curriculum indications are not detailed, the general principle underlying geographical knowledge is clearly specified, most notably in the notion of the earth "organism" and its distinct natural regions. Thus, from class 4 onwards the curriculum spirals outwards from the neighbourhood of the school to larger, more distant regions that are treated as wholes. Furthermore, as the child develops emphasis shifts from a crude form of natural determinism to one more subtle, drawing on the interplay between nature and culture.

Based on this synthetic notion of the natural region, teachers build geographies through detailed description of people and nature. Although accomplished with varying degrees of skill, a key element of the learning discourse in each case study was the construction of empirically-based "concrete images" to evoke a sense of place or region, with the imaginative-picture acting both as a representation and a moment of knowledge transaction, or an "imaginative transaction". Moreover, and unique to Waldorf, in its adaptation for the child, knowledge is often historically contextualized and storied, with the strong tendency to portray the natural region as the scene for colonial adventures and conquest. However, although the worldview presented may carry powerful ideological overtones and, as shown in the lesson transcripts, reinforce cultural stereotypes, its construction is also highly personalized. Not only does it depend primarily on the teacher's interpretation of the main lesson theme, but also on the management and dynamics of classroom discourse. With the opportunity for free rendering of subject knowledge and learning strategy within the Waldorf schema, the geographical knowledges created therefore show considerable variation.

My own approach, for example, following the phenomenological method, relied heavily on narrative to describe the qualities and relationships between different objects in the environment, in order to build up a picture of the whole region. This drew directly on Steiner's synthetic, metaphysical concept of the threefold organism. Furthermore, the subjective nature of this representation was reinforced by the close control of classroom discourse. However, further investigations of classroom practice shows that within the framework of the synthetic region the holistic representation varies. Foremost, knowledge shows traits of each teacher's own worldview, drawing, in some cases, on explicitly political discourse or withholding from historical narrative. Some teachers also rely

heavily on open dialogue with pupils. In these instances knowledge is built up more collaboratively and reflectively, drawing on pupils' own viewpoints as well as the teacher's. On a practical level, however, these approaches show evidence of being more difficult to manage. Given the Waldorf emphasis on the teacher as knowledge authority, and the reinforcement of this position through the method of "presenting" knowledge in a narrative form, these nuances in the dynamics of classroom discourse had a significant impact on the worldviews constructed.

Whilst different patterns of discourse and representation emerge from the empirical study, the salient feature of the Waldorf approach is clearly evident. Foremost, and a feature highlighted most clearly from lesson observations, is the way the two archetypes underpinning the knowledge-building process combine to create a powerful learning discourse. Whilst method is attuned to the child's natural capacity to imbibe images and transform these into a more clearly-defined thought-forms, allowing for the sleep process, the geographical representation inherent in the imagery is inevitably positional. Furthermore, it is consolidated through the repetitive element of the threefold lesson structure. Learning based on the philosophical principle of freedom to think and learn is, in practice, still embedded in its own worldview. To reiterate the point made above, for an approach that relies so heavily on the narrative method, in the form of a "presentation" of the teacher's own knowledge, to widen the perspective depends primarily on allowing opportunities for reflection and discussion. This depends directly on the way the classroom discourse involved in knowledge-building is managed.

From this investigation two important questions therefore emerge that relate directly to the philosophy underpinning practice, including its wider application. Firstly, does Waldorf need to update its archetypal image of the child and the world? Secondly, given the education's metaphysical framework, what, in the context of geography, is the realistic potential for the transference of skills to the mainstream?

Regarding the first question, as emphasized above, judgement of the Waldorf approach depends foremost on personal views regarding its underlying philosophy and educational agenda. Drawing explicitly on a holistic image of the developing child and a broader view of the intellect, Waldorf education upholds the "soul-aesthetic" realm of the

imagination as the foundation for learning, and, in the long-term, human spiritual development. As noted, this directly challenges educational instrumentalism, or education as an intellectual training primarily for economic reproduction.³ Moreover, as part of the alternative paradigm of holistic, ecological thinking, Waldorf subject knowledges, including geography, are synthetic and organically developed. However, given the era in which the Waldorf school was originally developed, it could be argued that a certain degree of updating is necessary. This study has highlighted two areas of Waldorf's philosophical framework that requires attention.

Firstly, whilst an organic form of cognitive engagement, without the use of preconceived intellectual schemata, is clearly evident, investigation of practice shows that the rational and critical element of Waldorf's learning discourse could be further developed. The question therefore arises as to how far learning involving analysis and personal judgement (the egoic, cognitive dimensions of thinking Steiner associated with the adult rather than the child), should be integrated with Waldorf's imaginative schema. As shown in the lesson transcripts, preadolescent pupils are as keen to probe and question knowledge as they are to imbibe it in an imaginative form. Furthermore, given that children are, in the contemporary media-saturated world, arguably more politicized, globally aware and able to question the cultural position in any representation of the world, it would seem necessary to allow opportunities for reflection and discussion. Whilst not undermining Steiner's original metaphysically framed child archetype (as the foundation of pedagogy), this raises the issue of whether the child's cognitive development is more accelerated in the contemporary world and whether Waldorf needs to adjust to this, and how. The need to integrate a rigorous cognitive element into Waldorf's imaginative schema was clearly evident in these examples of classroom practice. However, teachers addressed this in different ways, reflecting their deep-seated, personal views on the impact of instruction, in both its imaginative and intellectual or analytical dimensions, on child development. These ranged from, in one case, a willingness to 'play with the archetype' and challenge Waldorf's traditional 'fear of the intellect', to the view that learning in its more cognitive, intellectualized form is antithetical to the education's spiritual impulse. The need to strike a balance between

³ The tendency towards more rigorous forms of assessment is considered a part of this political process. This has received widespread criticism, most recently by the reports of the Cambridge Primary Review (2009) which questions the educational value of the apparatus of targets, testing, performance tables and national strategies for the young learner. Not surprisingly, this report has been received favourably by the Waldorf community.

imaginative and rational learning discourses was, nevertheless, evident.

Secondly, and also grounded in Steiner's worldview, is the archetypal form of geographical representation. Whilst the power of the holistic imagination to evoke a sense of regional difference is evident in the transcripts, questions emerge regarding the portrayal of peoples and cultures. Foremost, and a problem with traditional forms of regionalism based on the organic analogy, is the tendency to stereotype the non-European "other"; within the non-dualistic framework representation is largely naturalistic.

Moreover, given both the blurring of regional identities and the academic critique of empirically-based (and phenomenological) knowledges, portrayal of a distinctive regional character or "essence" should be treated with caution. As discussed above, however, this is essentially a philosophical question. In one sense, focus on social and political contexts arguably undermines the integrity of the geographical imagination, including the sense of wonder it aims to evoke, drawing pupils into a more adult, critical form of discourse. Additionally, Waldorf subject knowledges are, according to their philosophical framework, intrinsically holistic. For reasons embedded in anthroposophy's non-dualistic worldview, the unity of people and nature therefore takes precedence over that which separates and divides. This is a part of anthroposophy's universal vision.

Nevertheless, it is arguably still possible to construct a holistic geography of the modern world within the framework of the synthetic natural region. Steiner's metaphysical principle of the threefold organism is both a powerful and versatile tool to understand the organization of the natural world, and, in an eco-geographical sense, the unified entity of biome, landscape and people. However, this does not imply that the geographical picture cannot be developed by drawing on issues that cause changes or disturbances to the whole, such as human displacement, the exploitation of natural resources or the rise of the nation-state. However, while some of the respondents in this study attempt to broaden the geographical imagination culturally and politically, the impulse to idealize is generally very strong. To a large extent this reflects the importance of the historical narrative in Waldorf geography and, more widely, the evolutionary principle within the curriculum as a whole. In order to separate the historical from what is intrinsically geographical, and therefore of relevance in today's world, this aspect of geography needs revision. Once again, this emphasizes the need to use the anthroposophical archetype in a

versatile way, in order to achieve a form of holistic representation that can accommodate changes in human culture within the wider ecosystem.

Regarding the second question, an evaluation of the potential for the transference of skills from Waldorf to the mainstream, in the context of geography, has to distinguish between two areas of practice. Firstly, skills that could be applied in a different learning context; secondly, those aspects of pedagogy or subject knowledge that are embedded in Steiner's philosophy and are therefore distinctly Waldorf. On the one hand, this study has highlighted a number of what Ullrich calls 'common sense' features of pedagogy that could potentially be implemented outside the Steiner community (2000: 25).⁴ For example, using narrative to build imaginative-pictures is not only an engaging and inclusive form of learning discourse, it also enables the child to digest knowledge according to its natural constitution and rhythmic processes (Hart 2007). Although less suited to the more conceptual and text-based approach of the mainstream, including its more fragmented timetable structure, such a method could, to a certain extent, be integrated. Furthermore, this study highlights the benefits of an organic, child-centred approach to knowledge-building. This resonates with the wider, postmodern epistemological impulse in geographical thought, with its emphasis on generating knowledge that is less conceptually-defined and more sensitive to context, including the bodily constitution (Murdoch 2006).

On the other hand, Waldorf's distinctive organizational and philosophical framework places limits on what can be applied outside its school system. For example, teacher's understanding of pupils and their needs, as well as the organic approach to knowledge-building explored above, arguably depends on the regularity of teacher-pupil contact.⁵ Furthermore, as this research has shown, Steiner's metaphysical understanding of the child and the world combine to create, in practice, the framework for a unique and powerful learning discourse. Following an imaginative path to understanding this leads pupils ultimately to a holistic worldview. Moreover, to implement such an approach, and as the Waldorf schema intends, this requires a willingness on the part of the teacher to immerse in Steiner's philosophy. According to Steiner, this depends foremost on a

⁴ In Ullrich's view the reason for Steiner education's appeal lies not in 'anthroposophic doctrine' but in its non-sectarian 'generic' or developmental approach to teaching and learning (2000: 25).

⁵ This would be difficult to achieve outside the Waldorf class organization and main lesson system, which permits the daily study of a particular topic over a number of weeks, without interruption.

personal deepening of knowledge through engagement with anthroposophy, not so much in its textual form, but experientially, in the application of its principles to life in the classroom and beyond.

On this note, and in conclusion, I return to the point made in my introduction. Whilst the motivation to pursue this research arose from the personal challenges involved in working with Steiner's philosophy as a class teacher, it was not my intention to undermine its metaphysical framework. Rather, it was my aim to explore and highlight the distinctive philosophical framework underpinning Waldorf's holistic approach to geography, as well as the potentially problematic areas of practice. To do this it has been necessary to distinguish between two areas of the Waldorf schema.

Firstly, the body of knowledge, known as anthroposophy, that Steiner developed as the basis for a renewal of cultural life. Here, Steiner's ambitious contribution lies in his understanding of the way diverse human practices, including education, medicine and agriculture, can work with the laws of the spiritual universe. Not only is this knowledge universally relevant, from a holistic and evolutionary viewpoint it is arguably vital. However, belonging to the realm of intuitive knowledges of the wisdom tradition, rather than orthodox science, it is also ontologically challenging.

Secondly, interpretation and implementation of this philosophy at the personal level, as the framework for classroom practice. Whilst Steiner established the groundwork or "archetypes" for a deeper understanding of the child and the world, he stressed that this was essentially a living knowledge that had to evolve and accommodate the cultural impulses and contingencies of the times. As noted by one Waldorf educator: 'There can be no stasis in a school founded to meet the needs of ever-changing children within a constantly shifting social, cultural and economic environment' (Clouder cited in Kiersch 2005: 3). In the spirit of anthroposophy, progressive change relies on the freedom of the individual to develop, through personal effort and mobility of thinking, forms of practice that are relevant to the contemporary world. Although the authority of Steiner's anthroposophical discourse has, arguably, led to a degree of inertia in Waldorf practice, as a holistic philosophy it is, by its nature, flexible and capable of adaptation. This research has shown that, based on anthroposophy's holistic vision of the child and the world, learning strategies can be both versatile and relevant. Furthermore, they can still

uphold the fundamental Waldorf principles of freedom and balance in the learning process. To be able to adjust and progress, however, depends on openness to critical examination. The self-reflexive element of this research, although only one journey of interpretation, has hopefully shown the value of such an inquiry.

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Note: Steiner's texts and lecture cycles are ordered according to their sequence in the Bibliographical Survey or archive of Steiner's works (GA number)

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